

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, PROF BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE BALFOUR CAMPUS OF THE GERT SIBANDE TVET COLLEGE, 24 MAY 2024

Programme Director, Mr Sam Zungu, DDG for TVET Colleges;
Executive Mayor of Dipaleseng Local Municipality, Cllr. K Moeketsi;
All Councillors present;
Acting Director General, Ms Thembisa Futshane;
Deputy Director General for Skills Development, Mr Zukile Mvalo;
Deputy Director General for Planning, Ms Nolwazi Gasa;
Regional Manager for NW&MP Region, Dr Nick Balkrishen;
President of the South African College Principals Organisation, Prof Dipiloane Phutsisi;
Gert Sibande TVET College Principal, Mr Molifi Mabe;
Principals from TVET and CET Colleges;
Chairpersons and CEOs of SETAs;
Mr Mandla Tibane, First Deputy Secretary of the SACP in Mpumalanga;
Officials from both my Department of Higher Education and Training and Department of Science and Innovation;
Student leadership;
Members of the Media;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with immense pride that I stand before you today to mark the inauguration of yet another Technical and Vocational Education and Training campus.

We deliver top quality infrastructure

This is without doubt one of the best ways in which we can mark 30 years of democracy by giving the people of the Gert Sibande District a state-of-the-art facility. I always tell people that, when my Department makes a promise to deliver on infrastructure, we deliver.

Not only do we deliver on our promise to build infrastructure, when we deliver such infrastructure, we deliver top class infrastructure. We do not unveil mkokothelo buildings that were built with cheap material. We do this because we believe our young people deserve the best.

The strategic and policy context for the expansion of TVET college infrastructure

For a while, our TVET College sector had no clear infrastructure expansion programme. This led to a situation where there was no systematic capital investment in major infrastructure.

As a consequence, this left many of our young people with limited access to educational and training opportunities and exacerbated what is commonly referred to as the NEET problem, which means people who are not in any education, employment, or training.

In response to the growing NEET problem, as Minister, I directed my Department of Higher Education and Training, to develop a clear and comprehensive plan to reposition our TVET Colleges in order change how they are perceived in society.

It was for this and other reasons that we made the expansion our TVET sector a national priority in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system. Therefore, our plan to reposition our TVET Colleges is aimed at among others, expanding access to post-school institutions.

It also seeks to change the inferior and sometimes ill formed perceptions often associated with public TVET Colleges. We also aim to emphasise articulation, the remodelling of current infrastructure and making our TVET Colleges institutions of choice for our young people.

In fact, in other countries, not all young people go to traditional universities in order to develop themselves and make a meaningful contribution in the economy. To make this point is not to suggest that university education is not important.

I am simply saying that the available evidence suggests that, as a country, you cannot rely on your university system alone to drive skills development and stimulate meaningful economic growth.

TVET colleges and the development of priority skills

Our plan to reposition our TVET colleges also seeks to align with the key objectives of our country's National Skills Development Strategy, which talks about among others, promoting the growth of our public TVET College system to ensure that it is responsive to the sector, the local regions and the national skills needs and priorities.

In this regard, our country's National Development Plan (NDP) and our White Paper for Post-School Education and Training expects that by 2030, we should be producing 30 000 qualified artisans per year.

We need to intensify our efforts towards achieving the NDP target and I believe that our TVET Colleges are more than capable of enabling us to reach and even surpass this target. In fact, at the moment, we are producing an average 20 000 qualified artisans per year.

With the current electricity generation challenges and the need to regularly fix things such as potholes, it is indisputable that we need artisans more than ever before.

The detail of our plan to expand our TVET sector

As part our plan to expand our TVET sector, we identified thirteen (13) new campuses for development as well as three (3) existing ones for the development of additional buildings.

To achieve this goal, we have invested over R2.880 billion in the development and refurbishment of sixteen (16) new TVET Campuses. Of the 16 sites, 10 campuses: Thabazimbi, Umzimkhulu, Graaf-Reinet, Nongoma Gert Sibande, Aliwal North, Kwagqikazi, Ngqungqushe, Nkandla A and Bhambanani are completed and operational.

The contribution of this new Balfour campus

This brings me to the new campus that we are launching here today. The construction of this new Balfour campus of the Gert Sibande TVET College was valued at approximately R150 000 000.

This new campus will offer a diverse range of programmes designed to meet the demands of our evolving economy, from engineering and information technology to healthcare and hospitality.

When the Balfour Campus opened in 2014 its 105 Level 2 Civil Engineering was being offered in the building of Hoer and Laerskool Balfour, as a temporary measure. I am informed that, after today's official launch, the campus will start moving from the rented buildings to this new, state of the art premises.

Currently, there are three buildings on the campus. They include: The administration block. The theory building that consists of two computer laboratories that can accommodate up to 70 students each, as well as the double sized classrooms and the engineering block that consists of four workshops as well as smaller skills venues on the upper floor.

As part of unveiling this new campus, I am also pleased to announce that, our Fibre Processing and Manufacturing SETA (FP&M) is committing R11,8 million to the Gert Sibande TVET college. This amount will cover the launch sponsorship, Bursaries, Learner Placement, Skills and Learnership in furniture making.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the provincial government of Mpumalanga and the Local and District municipalities for continuing to support the development of this College.

A special word of gratitude to the Dipaleseng Local Municipality for donating the land on which the new campus is built. I also want to thank our various SETAs and entities such NSFAS and Higher Health, for their various contributions to this launch event.

This new campus belongs to the people of the Gert Sibande District, and I wish to urge you to look after this new facility and ensure that when we come here in 5 or 10 years, this facility must still be in a good condition.

Most importantly, this new campus is a further contribution to increasing access to educational and training opportunities for the young people of this area and to give impetus to skills development and local economic development in the Gert Sibande District.