

## **Nxesi awards bursaries in effort to clean 'corrupt' public works, build capacity**

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By Xolisa Phillip

Minister of Public Works Thulas Nxesi's department has awarded 40 bursaries in 2017 as part of its ongoing schools programme and seven-year plan to rebuild the department, which in the past was mired in corruption.

Nxesi conceded at a bursary awarding ceremony held at St George Hotel in Irene last Friday that, "had we had an adequate complement of professional and technical staff — such as qualified project managers, quantity surveyors and engineers — then we would have avoided most of the irregularities that we witnessed all too often in the past".

The programme started in 2013, which has resulted in the department adopting 16 high schools dotted across all nine provinces. The model for the programme was adapted from the Council for the Built Environment's skills pipeline strategy.

The Department of Public Works has partnered with Unisa, the University of Pretoria, the Outlook Foundation and the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement to execute the programme's objective of creating a skills pipeline for the department.

The built environment has a yawning gap of black professionals, especially women, and one of the aims of the programme is to ensure that inroads are made for transformation.

"Since 2014, 228 bursaries have been awarded. In 2016, 163 students were enrolled, 59 students completed their studies, 27 of whom are in the department in either the internship or young professionals programme. Thirty-two students are expected to join the department in 2017 as interns and will then move on to its young professionals programme," said Nxesi.

The programme is run by the department's Human Capital Investment Unit.

The 2017 40 bursars will pursue studies in: engineering (civil, structural, transport, electrical, water care, mechanical, chemical and hydrology), analytical chemistry, construction project management, quantity surveying, architecture, landscape architecture, urban and regional planning, interior design, horticulture, actuarial sciences and property management.

“Bursary holders sign a contract to join the department’s candidacy programme upon graduation to work for department for a period equivalent to the number of years they received [financial assistance],” said Nxesi, adding that both the department and graduates benefited from the arrangement.

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