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## **SPEECH**

### **DPWI BURSARY AWARDS: CULTIVATING THE SKILLS PIPELINE TO TURN SOUTH AFRICA INTO A CONSTRUCTION SITE**

*(Note to editors: The following keynote address was delivered by Public Works & Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson at the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure Bursary Awards held at the Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre in Boksburg, Gauteng, on Friday, 17 January 2025)*

- Public Works & Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson stated that the awarding of 63 bursaries represents a significant investment in creating a skills pipeline to turn South Africa into a construction site.
- Policy changes introduced by the Minister will require bursary recipients to work for the department or one of its entities for two years or in the private sector, ensuring improved skills retention and diversity across our provinces.
- The Minister emphasised that recipients bear the important responsibility of using this opportunity to improve the lives of South Africans through infrastructure development.

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to be here with you today as we award 63 bursaries to deserving students at the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure's 2025 Bursary Award Ceremony.

I can see the excitement on your faces, a reflection of the pride and joy that comes with the next phase of your life following your matric results.

This ceremony is not just about awarding bursaries to students pursuing studies in the built environment—it sends a powerful message to South Africans across the country: we are building the human foundation necessary for continued infrastructure investment in our nation.

Today, we celebrate possibility and progress, honouring exceptional young South Africans who will play a critical role in building the future of our country.

These students will soon become qualified engineers, quantity surveyors, architects, and electricians, creating a vital skills pipeline that will help South Africa become a construction site for decades to come. This will drive economic growth and create thousands of jobs—our department's core mission.

Through the skills represented in this room, we are laying the foundation for meaningful change in urban and rural communities. Today, we are making a significant investment in building a better South Africa.

The bursary recipients we celebrate today are no strangers to us. Many of these students come from schools with strong mathematics and physics programmes, identified, monitored, and mentored over several years through our Schools Programme.

While these schools were identified prior to my appointment, I am pleased to announce that I have expanded the reach of this bursary programme to include more schools, ensuring every South African with an interest in studying in the built environment can access this opportunity.

Previously, bursary holders were not required to return to the department or remain in South Africa after completing their studies. This often resulted in the loss of valuable skills that could have benefited the nation. We are changing this to ensure value for money in this programme.

Recipients will now be required to work for the department or one of its entities for a period of two years. This policy shift will help us retain and develop a pool of talented professionals, strengthening the department's institutional capacity to deliver on its mandate.

Allow me to share a success story that highlights the value of this bursary programme. One of today's attendees, Edwin Macrae Bath, was once a Public Works & Infrastructure bursary holder. He worked for the department and is now a Member of Parliament, serving on the Public Works & Infrastructure Portfolio Committee. His journey exemplifies the positive impact this programme can have.

Our bursary policy prioritises students from Quintiles 1 to 3 schools, focusing on supporting underprivileged communities. While this approach has successfully addressed socio-economic barriers, we recognise the importance of ensuring future cohorts reflect South Africa's full diversity.

Moving forward, we will refine our selection criteria to balance socio-economic considerations with broader demographic representation, ensuring this scheme truly represents the nation's diversity and potential.

At the core of our work is a shared vision: turning South Africa into a construction site.

This vision goes far beyond erecting buildings or laying roads. It is about creating opportunities, improving lives, and building a nation where every citizen can thrive.

Globally, infrastructure development is among the most powerful tools for stimulating economic growth. It drives local investment, creates jobs, and forms the foundation for essential services like healthcare, education, and public safety.

However, delivering on this vision requires more than funding or plans. It requires skilled professionals equipped to address the challenges of the built environment. That is where our bursary recipients come in.

You are not just students—you are future leaders, innovators, and nation-builders.

To our bursary recipients, remember that education is more than a personal achievement—it is a tool for nation-building.

The bridges you design, the urban spaces you plan, and the housing projects you oversee will improve lives and communities.

Think of the lives you will touch:

- The child who crosses a bridge safely because you helped design it.
- The family who finds dignity and security in a home you helped build.

- The entrepreneur who thrives because of the commercial space you planned.

This opportunity comes with great responsibility. As professionals in the built environment, you must uphold the highest standards of integrity, accountability, and innovation.

The success of the DPWI Bursary Scheme is the result of partnerships with schools, universities, SETAs, and professional bodies.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our partners for identifying and nurturing talent. To the principals and teachers of our adopted schools, your mentorship has laid the foundation for these students' success.

To the parents and guardians, thank you for your unwavering support and belief in your children's potential.

To our bursary recipients, congratulations on this well-deserved achievement. Today is the beginning of an incredible journey, and we look forward to seeing the positive changes you will bring to South Africa's built environment.

Together, we are turning South Africa into a construction site—driving economic growth, creating jobs, and improving lives.

Let us continue to invest in education, infrastructure, and the future of this great nation. Let us build South Africa together.

Thank you.

### **Enquiries**

**James de Villiers**

Spokesperson to the Ministers

[james.devilliers@dpw.gov.za](mailto:james.devilliers@dpw.gov.za)

082 766 0276

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