



public works

Department:
Public Works
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DPW Human Capital Investment:

Bursary Awards Ceremony

**Burgerspark Hotel, Pretoria
27 March 2014**

Keynote Address:

**Honourable TW Nxesi, MP
Minister of Public Works**

PROTOCOL

- Programme Director, Mr Thulani Ntombela
- CEOs and representatives of the Construction Education and Training Authority – as well as entities of Public Works – in particular the CBE (Council for the Built Environment) which has assisted in developing a skills strategy for the sector
- Professor Tinus Maritz of the University of Pretoria and representatives of the Higher Education sector
- DDG: Corporate Services and officials of the Department of Public Works – particularly from the Human Capital Investment Unit which has facilitated this occasion, and
- Most importantly, the successful students who are today receiving bursaries from the Department of Public Works.

Welcome all. It gives me great pleasure to be a part of this important event. Clearly it is an important occasion for the additional 82 beneficiaries of the bursaries to be awarded; bringing the total number of 2014 DPW external bursary beneficiaries to 132.

But I also need to make the point that this initiative is part of a much bigger picture – our Seven Year Plan to rebuild the Department of Public Works – which includes the following objectives:

- To rebuild the technical and professional capacity of Public Works and the state;
- To promote training and skills development in the Built Environment – in line with the needs of the National Infrastructure Plan and the NDP; and
- To transform the Built Environment professions to reflect the demographics of the country – and in

particular to facilitate access for learners from disadvantaged communities.

When I worked in the education sector – as General-Secretary of the teachers union, SADTU – I always made the point - around Budget time - that money spent on the education of our children is not simply another expenditure and therefore a drain on the fiscus. Rather, it must be seen as an investment in the lives of the learners, in the economy, and in the future well-being of the society as a whole.

Let us never forget the words of our own Tata Madiba: *“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*

You will be aware – from media reports over several years – of major challenges and weaknesses in the Department of Public Works. There have been a number of scandals in relation to leases and construction projects in the past - due to poor

management controls, lack of technical capacity and corruption. The Nkandla security upgrade is just one more example of the systemic crisis that was Public Works.

But we don't just lament. We have to act. In the case of lease fraud in the Johannesburg region the officials concerned were dismissed; the landlord is in court. In the case of irregularities committed on the Nkandla project – and with the assistance of the SIU (Special Investigating Unit) and the Auditor-General – we are preparing disciplinary and other measures to hold people to account and recover funds.

When I was appointed as Minister two years ago my first job was simply to come clean and acknowledge that there were serious challenges. We then had to carefully analyse the problems and develop solutions. This we have done – and the measures taken include a commitment to rebuild the professional capacity of the Department.

I firmly believe 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 and over-spending that we witnessed all too often in the past.

[You will recall one of the comments of the Public Protector was that a Public Works Department employee – a professional Architect - had warned in 2009 that spending on the Nkandla security upgrade was spiralling out of control. Unfortunately it was a lone voice. Our vision now is to rebuild the professional and technical capacity at the very core of the operations of the Department of Public Works.]

It follows, therefore, that as Public Works we have a clear and strategic long-term interest and commitment to technical and professional training in the Built Environment – both to rebuild the professional capacity

of the Department – and to contribute to scarce skills required in the Built Environment generally.

This task is all the more urgent as the country embarks on a massive National Infrastructure Plan as part of the National Development Plan.

The Schools Programme

As part of the initiative to build capacity in the Built Environment sector, the Department has adopted 15 schools in its Schools Programme. The Programme targets less resourced schools situated in rural, farm and townships areas – but schools that are clearly well-managed and where learners are performing well.

The need for the Schools Programme was informed by the 2008 Skills Audit Report conducted by the Council for the Built Environment. The Audit analysed skills shortages within the Built Environment – which were mainly attributed to poor throughput rates in the

education system. The Schools Programme therefore seeks to address these challenges and promote the teaching of Maths and Science as well as to open up access to the Built Environment professions.

CBE's Skills Audit – and more recent updates – indicates that still only a quarter of professionals in the Built Environment are black. One of the mandates of the Department of Public Works is to facilitate transformation in the Built Environment – and the Schools Programme is clearly in line with that mandate to promote the training of black professionals in the sector.

The specific aims of the Schools Programme include the following:

- To promote Built Environment and property related careers by supporting maths and science learners

- To encourage learners to take up maths and science
- To support learners to grasp maths and science concepts through additional tutoring and targeted teaching and learning methodologies
- To address the lack of school resources that lead to poor performance of learners
- To support and equip Educators and the School Management Team with skills and techniques relevant to the schooling environment
- To promote parental participation in learner education, and
- To offer bursaries to outstanding performers.

Learners who participated in the Schools Programme are prioritised by the Department of Public Works in

the awarding of bursaries to follow Built Environment or property careers. They will be afforded an opportunity to go through the Department's candidacy programme when they qualify and ultimately acquire professional registration.

Bursaries to students who are already enrolled

The first group of 50 beneficiaries on the Schools Programme started their courses in Higher Education at the beginning of this year – 2014. So of course it is going to be 3 to 4 years before they complete. That is too long to wait. That is why, as Public Works, we are now offering bursaries to students who are already enrolled in Higher Education courses and are performing well. There are 132 beneficiaries this year.

Before I go any further, I need to acknowledge the good work and support of the Construction Education

and Training Authority. The CETA has made available funding of R50 million for the following purposes:

- Recruitment to the following training programmes: Artisans, Candidacy Programme for professionals, and the Department's Skills Programme and Internship Programme;
- The funding also makes possible the awarding of 120 bursaries, of which there are 50 bursaries for the Schools Programme that we awarded in January.
- The other 82 bursaries are being awarded today to second to fifth year students – from disadvantaged backgrounds - currently studying in the Built Environment disciplines at various universities such as – Pretoria, Wits, UJ, UCT, UKZN, Nelson Mandela, Stellenbosch and Cape Peninsula University of Technology).

- The CETA contributed R60,000 per annum to each bursary.

Now at this point the mathematicians amongst you – or at least those paying attention - will have noticed a discrepancy. I said we were awarding 82 bursaries today. But I also said that the CETA was funding only 70. Let me explain:

The CETA funds bursaries for disciplines in the Built Environment. So mechanical and chemical engineers fall outside the CETA's sphere of activity. But as the Department of Public Works we also want to support students studying mechanical and chemical engineering – so the Department will be funding those bursaries.

Let me give you an example of why we also need mechanical engineers in Public Works. A large part of our mandate is to maintain government buildings – many of which have lifts which sometimes malfunction.

And yet we do not have a single mechanical engineer on the staff of Public Works. That has to change.

I also need to mention that the CETA made an undertaking to fund the Candidacy Programme / Young Professionals Programme providing all of the 120 bursary holders an opportunity to be mentored towards professional registration as part of the programme run by the Human Capital Investment Unit of the Department of Public Works.

I want to thank the Human Capital Investment officials for the work that they do – and also draw your attention to the Bursary Care Programme that they run – a student support programme intended to ensure that bursary students cope, progress and achieve in the difficult world of academia.

One point I need to raise with Human Capital Investment: I notice that out of 82 bursary awardees, 42 are female and 40 male. I congratulate you.

Historically, the Built Environment professions have been male-dominated. As Public Works we are very mindful that we need to constantly strive to correct this imbalance.

This is a good start. We have to remind ourselves sometimes just how far we have come since 1994:

- We now have universal access to basic education – now including Grade R; and
- We have doubled the number of students in the Higher Education sector and provided bursaries and loans to allow access to poorer students.

We still have a long way to go to overcome the inequalities of the past – but I believe that we are on course.

The focus now must be on improving the quality of education. Interventions such as the DPW's Schools Programme make an important contribution.

But as we seek to build quality learning and teaching we have to work together – government, Basic Education, Higher Education and Training, the SETAs, parents, SGBs, teachers, teacher unions and the community – each with our specific roles and responsibilities.

Finally, let me address a few words to the students who will be awarded bursaries: Never forget that you are here today as a result of your own hard work and commitment.

Your future – as you negotiate the Higher Education environment – holds many opportunities, but also many challenges. Ultimately, success is dependent on you. You need to keep up the hard work – and avoid all the obvious temptations.

Support structures are in place – academic, spiritual and psychological – so if you do run into problems seek help as soon as possible. There are people there whose job it is to support you – so make use of these facilities.

When I say work hard, take a balanced approach – also make time for sporting, cultural and other activities. You know the saying: “A healthy mind and a healthy body.” So work hard – but enjoy your time in Higher Education as a time to develop as a person, holistically – personally, socially, spiritually, physically – as well as academically and professionally.

I wish you well for the future. Indeed, you are the future of the Built Environment professions in South Africa.

I thank you.