

**THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, MR GEOFF DOIDGE, MP,
GIVES A MOTIVATIONAL TALK TO THE MATRIC LEARNERS AT
THEIR FAREWELL FUNCTION**

VENUE: Mount Currie Senior Secondary School, Kokstad,

DATE: Friday, 03 October 2008

- The Programme Director
- The School Principal
- Our educators
- Members of the School Governing Body present tonight
- Our distinguished learners
- Parents
- Esteemed Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tonight we gather to commemorate the journey we have traveled together as educators, learners and the community since the beginning of the year. The day marks a significant milestone on the calendar of Mount Currie SSS as teachers look back with pride on the job they have done to prepare this lot for their final hurdle. However, let us remember that a milestone does not mean the end of the road, but rather it signifies the end one stretch and the beginning of another. And this holds true for our matric learners tonight.

As you graduate from this noble institution, many will be confronted with profound choices that will determine your future role in the society and most importantly your contribution to the development of South Africa; its people and its economy.

Many years ago I too walked through the corridors of this same noble institution and like all of you tonight, I was forced to grow overnight and make decisions that have since lived with me. Looking around then, I realized the injustices and inequalities in our communities and the society at large, and I decided to be a social worker of a different kind. That was when I got involved in the struggle to question and fight the system to realize the freedom of our country from racial discrimination, oppression, poverty and underdevelopment. In 1994 our efforts were rewarded and a new order was born; an order that will now be depended on you tonight to nurture, protect and help to grow.

My appointment as the National Minister of Public Works on Thursday 25 September 2008 was a re-affirmation of the struggles I and many like myself, have fought to give effect to the vision of South Africa that is democratic, non-racist, non-sexist and prosperous. But the vision is just the beginning. The real challenges come with the realization of that vision. The prosperity of South Africa lies in its human resources, the very same people who design technologies, manage enterprises, create wealth and grow the economy of the country for the benefit of all its citizens. In short, we need to grow a new generation of highly skilled individuals in all sectors of our economy, not least the construction sector.

The Department of Public Works manages a multi-billion rand budget to provide and manage public infrastructure of government on behalf of the people of South Africa. As a result we work on a daily basis

with the construction industry to build, maintain and operate thousands of essential buildings and properties out of which critical service delivery is dispensed. Think for a moment of the police, the courts, the army, the schools, the hospitals, the roads and the prisons. These and many others are the products of the imaginative men and women, with requisite skills at the Departments of Public Works and Transport. Tonight looking at you, I am already beginning to see future engineers of all kinds, quantity surveyors, architects, construction project managers, landscapers, contractors and artisans.

Sadly the legacy of apartheid is still with us as we battle illiteracy, skills shortages and poor vocational guidance particularly with regard to construction related studies. Our youth despite government efforts to educate them and raise their levels of awareness, still continue to regard construction and built environment with low-class work. This is fallacious.

The construction industry is worth almost one hundred billion rand (R100 billion) per annum with government infrastructure requirements accounting for almost half of that. Without the construction industry, about 5.1 %of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would be lost to the economy together with nearly half a million jobs and at a great sacrifice to public service delivery and social development. For instance, the ability of the country to successfully host the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup Tournament would be compromised as we would not be in a position to procure and construct the magnificent stadiums we so eagerly anticipate. Furthermore, government would not be

able to effect its development and transformation efforts aimed at promoting the cause of the black contractors, women and other small and emerging contractors so that they rise up to become prime beneficiaries of the construction boom that we are witnessing at the moment.

During the construction of the two correctional facilities (prisons) at Kokstad in the early 2000s, government experimented with its policy of transformation and ensured that the eighty eight million rand (R88 million) medium prison was undertaken by the black and developing contractor under the Department of Public Works Strategic Project Initiative. Despite early teething problems, many beautiful infrastructure projects were delivered as such including the R40 million Khayelitsha Magistrate Court near Cape Town and the R30 million Richards Bay Police Complex in KwaZulu-Natal, once again proving that there is a future in the construction industry if we continue to promote and generate appropriate skills and competencies.

Nationally the government has identified shortages of suitably skilled labour as one of the six key constraints under the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). Consequently the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (Jipsa) has elevated the built environment professions as among the critical sectors in the efforts to grow skills. Following a skills audit in 2006, the forum of Public Works Ministers endorsed the aggressive recruitment of skilled personnel. Internally, my department is forging ahead with efforts to

contribute to skills replenishment. About 250 bursaries pertinent to the core business of the Department were awarded to people outside the department while 691 interns, learners, young professionals and trainee artisans were recruited. Recently one of our employees has returned from a one year intensive engineering apprenticeship with a leading French engineering company as part of JIPSA.

Many government departments have taken a cue from the Department of Education and are constantly awarding bursaries to deserving students. In 1999 government passed the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act (NSFAS) to assist academic institutions with financial contributions so that deserving students could be assisted. Under the scheme, students are required to repay 60% of the government study loan only after the completion of their studies.

I encourage you to avail yourselves of these opportunities and where necessary, invite government departments to come and share with you this invaluable information. My department remains ready to comply with your formal requests. Our Human Resource Unit has an active outreach programme to come and discuss, demonstrate and advise on career options. Other Units in the Department such as the Construction Industry Development and the Expanded Public Works Programme will also share with you other initiatives aimed at skilling our youth including the 2014 Youth Foundation and the National Youth Service.

The 2014 Youth Foundation is a joint initiative with the construction sector to encourage mathematics and science at schools especially for the students willing to pursue construction and built environment studies. In 2007 about 122 learners from 29 schools nationally participated. The Department also runs the Military Skills Development Programme with the Department of Defence to train youth on basic military skills and discipline before they are offered bursaries to pursue construction studies. Currently 22 learners are in various tertiary institutions.

However, the flagship of the Department remains the National Youth Service under the Expanded Public Works Programme. Between 2007 and 2008 about 9 500 unemployed and un-skilled youth were recruited nationally on a one year learnership to work on various construction projects of government where they received both a classroom tuition and practical training in artisan disciplines as diverse as plumbing, bricklaying, carpentry, electrical wiring, plastering and paving, among others. We were encouraged to learn that some of them were absorbed into permanent employment by the contractors they worked with on site. Talks are underway to encourage most municipalities to employ them at the completion of their training, to allow them to work on some important and urgent municipal infrastructure projects.

On behalf of government, I wish you well and hope that you will be matured enough to realize that this country will be poorer without you. Through the efforts of people like you, our communities will stop to be

the reservoirs of cheap and unskilled labour and begin to be the havens of skills and expertise. The task is not insurmountable. We have seen other developing countries such as Brazil, India and Malaysia succeeding against the odds to cultivate human capital they need for their developmental agenda. Today some of these developing countries have become the marvel of the world and their skills are being systematically poached by the developed nations. Through you, South Africa has the same potential.

I thank you.