



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

BUDGET VOTE 2026

VOTE 17: DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER DR NOMUSA DUBE-NCUBE

National Assembly, Parliament, Cape Town

Honourable Chairperson,

Honourable Minister **Mr Buti Manamela**,

My colleague Deputy Minister **Dr Mimmy Gondwe**,

Chairperson and Members of the Portfolio Committee,

Vice-Chancellors, leaders of our institutions,
distinguished guests, and Honourable Members,

I. A QUESTION WE MUST ANSWER

Before I began preparing these remarks, a question stopped me — one I believe we are all, in this moment, compelled to answer honestly. What have we done with our young people? Have we equipped them with knowledge, skills, and opportunity? Or have we left them

on the margins of a democracy they inherited but cannot yet fully inhabit?

I ask not to accuse, but because I care deeply — and because history is unforgiving to nations that neglect their youth. No country has ever built lasting prosperity on the foundation of abandoned young people. No democracy has survived the quiet erosion of hope among its rising generation.

That question is the moral compass of this Budget Vote. And it is why the work of this Department is not administrative in nature alone. It is nation-building work. It is an act of national love.

II. WHAT OUR INVESTMENT DECLARES

Honourable Members, over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, we are committing R149.2 billion in 2026/27, R156.5 billion in 2027/28, and R162.2 billion in 2028/29. Programme 3 — University Education — accounts for over 82 percent of the Department's budget.

But let us be clear about what these numbers mean. Every rand is not a line on a spreadsheet. It is access for the poor. It is hope for a working-class child. It is a bursary that transforms a family's trajectory. These allocations represent our most concrete declaration that democracy must change the material conditions of people's lives — especially those who have waited the longest.

III. THE DISCIPLINE OF PUBLIC TRUST

I am proud to report that the Department has consistently achieved expenditure performance above 99 percent in recent financial years, with a stable audit posture. But I want to be clear — compliance alone is not our ambition. Our objective is to build institutions worthy of public trust.

Where weaknesses exist, they will be corrected. Where irregular expenditure is found, consequence management will follow. Where ethical breaches occur, there must be accountability. The democratic state cannot demand sacrifice from the poor while tolerating recklessness or ethical failure within public institutions. That is not governance. That is a betrayal. And we refuse it.

IV. UNIVERSITIES AS INSTRUMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

Our universities must not become islands of excellence surrounded by oceans of poverty. They must be engines of national transformation — centres of innovation that expand opportunity, dignity, and economic inclusion for all.

Through performance compacts, enrolment planning, and graduate tracer studies, we are ensuring that university outputs align with the skills agenda our economy demands. We need graduates who are not merely employable, but capable of driving industrialisation, entrepreneurship, and scientific advancement. That is the standard we are setting — and it is a standard our people deserve.

V. BUILDING FOR THE ECONOMY OF TOMORROW

I want to speak plainly about the future. The world our children will inhabit is being shaped by artificial intelligence, green industrialisation, robotics, biotechnology, and data science. Nations that fail to build advanced skills pipelines will not merely fall behind — they will become structurally dependent.

Our commitment to Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics is not an educational slogan. It is a sovereign capability strategy. The nations that will define this century will not be those that only extract raw materials. They will be nations that produce ideas — that produce technology, innovation, and solutions for humanity.

South Africa must position itself not as a consumer of global knowledge, but as a producer of African innovation, African research, and African intellectual leadership. That vision fills me with hope — and with urgent purpose.

VI. LEAVING NO YOUNG PERSON BEHIND

We must never normalise the despair of young people. We cannot accept a South Africa where millions move from classroom to unemployment, from qualification to hopelessness, from ambition to exclusion. When young people lose faith in the future, societies lose direction. And when they lose confidence in democracy itself, nations enter dangerous terrain.

The Khetha Career Development Services initiative is therefore not a programme — it is a promise. A promise that no young person will feel abandoned simply because they could not access a university placement immediately after matric. We are expanding TVET colleges, community education, micro-credentials, and workplace-based learning. Career guidance must become a national developmental instrument — not a privilege for the few.

VII. CONNECTING SOUTH AFRICA TO THE WORLD

Our internationalisation strategy is about ensuring that South African students and institutions can compete confidently in a rapidly changing global economy. Through bilateral and multilateral partnerships, we are expanding scholarships, strengthening research collaboration, and advancing mutual recognition of qualifications.

Our vision is for South Africa to emerge as a leading African centre of research excellence, innovation diplomacy, and intellectual leadership. Africa must not merely consume the knowledge of others. Africa must increasingly produce knowledge for humanity itself.

VIII. THE MISSION BEFORE US

Honourable Members, I stand here today with deep humility. We have not yet done enough. There is more to build. More to reform. More to deliver. But I also stand here with unshakeable hope — because I have seen what becomes possible when the state invests seriously in its people.

At its core, our responsibility is to expand human possibility. To build a South Africa where the child of a domestic worker, a farm worker, an unemployed parent, or a rural village has the same opportunity to dream, learn, innovate, and succeed as anyone else.

History will not judge us merely by how much we spent. History will judge us by whether we built a generation capable of carrying our country forward — with confidence, skill, innovation, ethical leadership, and hope.

Future generations will not ask whether we inherited challenges. They will ask whether we had the courage to confront them. Whether we had the vision to prepare our people for a changing world. And whether we had the wisdom to invest — not only in infrastructure and budgets

— but in human beings themselves as the greatest resource our nation possesses.

That is the responsibility history places before us today. And we must — as we should — rise to meet it.

I thank you.