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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **SAAphDs statement on the newly appointed ministers in the Department of Higher Education**

03 July 2024

With enthusiasm and anticipation, the South African Association of PhDs (SAAphDs) extends warmest congratulations to Dr Nobuhle Nkabane on her prestigious role as the new Minister of Higher Education in South Africa. May her tenure be marked by innovation and progress in the sector. This includes her deputies, Mr Buti Manamela and Dr Mimmy Gondwe serving with her in this portfolio.

The appointment of Dr Nobuhle Nkabane is to be welcomed for two reasons. Firstly, she is a remarkable servant of the people and an academic trailblazer as in 2019 she obtained a PhD in Public Administration from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, Dr Nkabane brings with her the considerable experience she gained as Deputy Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy in the previous 6<sup>th</sup> administration.

She also holds a Master of Administration (MAdmin) in Public Administration and a Bachelor of Administration (BAdmin), Honours in Public Administration from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, a Postgraduate Diploma in Labour Law from the University of the Western Cape, a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) in Human and Social Studies and a Diploma in Youth Development from the University of South Africa, and a National Diploma in Commercial Administration from Durban University of Technology.

Therefore, she is very much aware that the problems faced by the higher education sector in South Africa are deeply rooted in our school system and cannot be resolved without fundamentally reforming that system. The South African Association of PhDs would like to exhort the new minister to focus on 5 key challenges faced by the sector which include the following:

- 1. National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding:** The department should review the financial support for the “Missing Middle” through the acceleration of the Comprehensive Student Funding Model. A review of this is a loan scheme that aims to support students who come from families with a total household income of more than R350 000, but not more than R600 000 per annum which further disadvantages students. The loan system does not work due to the structural financial challenges faced by many students in South Africa. The department should expedite the upfront payment of NSFAS grants to TVET College and university students.
- 2. High Young Unemployment:** The high unemployment rate in South Africa both has an impact on and is impacted by the higher education sector. The high number of unemployed youths is due in part to their poor schooling and lack of higher education. Access to higher education should be increased for all previously disadvantaged South Africans.
- 3. Skills shortage:** South Africa is experiencing both a skills shortage and a skills mismatch. The country has a surplus of low and unskilled workers, while the modern economy needs higher skilled workers. Government has also not put policies in place to assist with the transition of workers from vanishing low-skilled jobs to the new higher skilled ones. The department should focus on adequately preparing our students for jobs and careers. Some studies indicate that 65% of students graduating from high school may have jobs and careers that don't exist today. We should be preparing our students, not just for known jobs and employment, but for jobs that may be coming in the future. The department should accelerate the National Civic Education and Health Skills Programme and ensure that students get access to the programme.

**4. Increase funding on research and innovation:** The department should address the issue of funding and there should be proper coordination of research programmes within the Human Sciences Research Council, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and the National Research Foundation—the Agriculture Research Council, the Medical Research Council, and the Council for Minerals Technology which all fall under different ministries. This would be a bold step which should catalyse better integration of the nation's research efforts. Furthermore, masters and PhD students should be granted better funding opportunities to further enhance their research projects.

**5. Clampdown on bogus colleges:** The Department should take great stride in dealing with "fly-by-night colleges and universities" that are not registered as institutions of learning with the correct Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), the Department of Higher Education or other relevant bodies. All such colleges that offer qualifications which are not recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) should be closed immediately and law enforcement agencies should deal with perpetrators. This includes unregistered colleges that offer honorary degrees.

Fixing higher education is impossible without fixing basic education, but higher education can improve the supply of talented teachers and help students make the transition to university life. Both would be powerful drivers of educational quality and will help overcome the inequalities that are so deeply entrenched in our system.

We wish the new minister all the success in this new challenging role and the SAAPhDs will always be there available to support and offer wise counsel.

**ENDS//**

**THIS STATEMENT WAS ISSUED BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF PhDs**

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