

NCOP Debate Speech on Vote 17: Higher Education and Training delivered by The MEC for Education, Mpumalanga Province, Ms. Lindi Masina

Honourable Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces,
Honourable Deputy Chairperson of the NCOP,
Honourable House Chairpersons,
Honourable Chief Whip of the NCOP,
Honourable Chairperson and Members of the Select Committee on Education, Sciences and Creative Industries,
Honourable Permanent and Special Delegates,
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislatures who join us today,
Representatives of the South African Local Government Association,
Deputy Ministers Dr Nomusa Dube-Ncube and Dr Mimi Gondwe,
Director-General Dr Sishi and the senior management of the Department,
Distinguished guests,

Sanibonani

It is both an honour and a privilege to participate in this important debate on Vote 17: Higher Education.

At the outset, from the Place of the Rising Sun, we rise in full support of the budget tabled by the Honourable Minister.

We do so in recognition and support of its central role in expanding access, advancing transformation and positioning higher education as a catalyst for skills development, inclusive economic growth and the reduction of unemployment both in our province and across the country.

Honourable Chairperson, we are particularly encouraged that this debate takes place during Youth Month, a defining period in our national calendar.

As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 16 June 1976 uprising, we are reminded that the struggle of young people was fundamentally about access to meaningful and equitable education.

This debate, therefore, carries a historic responsibility to ensure that the aspirations of that generation are fully realized.

In Mpumalanga, we continue to strengthen the knowledge, skills and value pipeline from basic to higher education.

We are encouraged by the solid foundation laid within our schooling system culminating to the Class of 2025 achieving an **86.55% pass rate**, positioning Mpumalanga firmly on course towards our target **of 91% in the 2026 National Senior Certificate Results**, with a strong emphasis on improving performance in the critical STEM subjects.

Through our targeted learner support, expanded digital learning platforms, and sustained investment in e-learning and smart school initiatives, we are equipping learners particularly those in rural areas with the skills required to thrive in a modern, knowledge-driven economy.

We are also a constant feeder to the tertiary education sector.

In this regard, the number of learners qualifying for bachelor's degree studies has grown steadily from **21,819** in 2023, to **27,885** in 2024, and furthermore to **28,610** in 2025.

This represents a cumulative total of **78,314** learners over the past three years progressing into higher education from Mpumalanga Province alone.

While this upward trajectory reflects improved and encouraging academic performance and rising aspirations among our youth, it also exposes structural constraints within the post-school education and training sector.

The growing demand for placement is putting significant pressure on available spaces in universities and TVET colleges particularly with regards to student accommodation, lecture facilities, and academic support services.

For many learners from rural and historically disadvantaged communities in Mpumalanga, access to higher education remains constrained not by ability,

but by limited institutional capacity, affordability challenges, and geographic location distance.

This reality underscores the urgent need to expand higher education infrastructure, including the establishment and strengthening of institutions within rural provinces such as Mpumalanga.

It further calls for innovative delivery models, including digital and blended learning to ensure that access is not determined by location.

If we are to truly address this, we must ensure that the growth in learner throughput is matched by a proportional expansion in opportunities within the post-school system.

We agree with the Honourable Minister that there can be no successful, sustainable industrialisation in this country without skills, without research, and without innovation.

Honourable Chairperson, our work is guided by the vision of the National Development Plan 2030, which calls for an inclusive, high-quality education system that seeks to eliminate inequality, unemployment and marginalisation.

In this regard, Mpumalanga integrated youth development into all aspects of its education programmes.

Currently, **37.2%** of our workforce representing are actively contributing as educators, members of school management teams within the system.

We continue to implement programmes that empower young people through bursaries, internships, learnerships, and accredited skills training for out-of-school youth.

At the same time, our promotion of **Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education** affirms the importance of language in learning, identity, and inclusion directly responding to the historical injustices that shaped the 1976 uprising.

Kungaba kuhle kutsi bantfwana betfu bakhule bakhuluma tilimi tesiSwati neSindebele, bafundze ngesiSwati ne Sindebele emabangeni laphansi baze

baphotfule tifundvo tabo emabangeni lasetulu ngaso Siswati nesiNdebele. Loko kufuneka kwenteke sisaphila, Mhlonishwa futsi nesive singakujabulela.

In our Province , We also value our strategic partnership with the University of Mpumalanga, which continues to create opportunities for collaboration in research, innovation, and teacher development further strengthening the post-school education ecosystem in our province.

This partnership enables the Province to leverage the University's expertise, research capacity, and human capital in support of our development priorities.

Key areas of collaboration includes but not limited to:

- Promoting sustainable agriculture and innovation;
- Enhancing skills development for government employees;
- Supporting environmental sustainability and eco-tourism;
- Advancing healthcare research and community programmes;
- Fostering entrepreneurship and job creation;
- Strengthening education through teacher development and curriculum support; and
- Improving service delivery through technological innovation.

Our Honourable Premier, Mr. Mandla Ndlovu, rightly described this partnership as a gamechanger in advancing provincial economic development priorities.

It represents a strategic alignment between academic excellence and government priorities, ultimately aimed at improving the lives of our people.

Honourable Chairperson, our approach is deliberate, focused, and community centred.

We are committed to building a system where every learner progresses successfully into higher education and beyond, where no young person is excluded due to location, lack of funding or circumstance beyond their own making.

In conclusion, we support this budget because it advances access to higher education, drives transformation, and invests in the future of our youth.

This budget brings us closer to realizing the vision of the National Development Plan 2030 and ensuring that the doors of learning and culture remain open to all.

As President Cyril Ramaphosa clearly stated in His 2026 State of the Nation Address:

“The Constitution calls on us to work towards a society in which every South African has a fair chance to make a better life for themselves.

In which every child receives a decent education and an opportunity to work and thrive.”

Let us, therefore, act with urgency and purpose to ensure that no young South African is left behind.

Ngiyabonga.