

Minister Pandor's speech at Universities South Africa research dialogue

1 June 2018

I am pleased to have the opportunity to make some opening remarks at this very important dialogue. Thank you for inviting me.

I have been in the DHET for over three months now and working to keep pace with all the programmes and most recent developments. I have been struck at how difficult it is to discern the nature of DHET investment in research and development, and have found this to be rather intriguing. I have assumed that we essentially leave universities to decide on this aspect of work, that is fine, but it does cause a niggling worry for me, one that I hope I will solve very soon.

Universities in South Africa enjoy an unspoken status of being one of the best developed systems on the continent. They lead in training African researchers at post graduate level and produce the largest volume of peer reviewed diverse research in Africa and much of the global South.

The focus of this dialogue meeting on global partnerships is very important because international co-operation through well designed research partnerships can serve as a strategic intervention in enhancing the number and quality of our post graduate programmes. Such programmes can also assist with diversifying our workforce and our student body.

DHET and DST are the two departments with the mandate of promoting and supporting research development in South Africa and in our universities. As you are all aware we are very concerned at the inadequate resourcing of R+D in South Africa – less than 1% of GDP has been recorded as our expenditure. For over a decade we have committed to raising this to 1,5% of GDP by 2019, we will probably not

reach that target. Seeking out partnerships may help to close the current gap.

If we are keen to pursue research partnerships that may enhance our performance, I think we will have to map out a set of desired partnerships that we will concretise over the next two years and possibly report on outcomes in 2020. Determining the nature of projects will require very intense South African university collaboration. Allow me to explore the possibilities with a few likely examples. It is better to precede the examples with an outline of what we want to achieve as South Africa through our institutions.

The National Development Plan sets out our national agenda 2030 as follows:

- The percentage of academics with PhDs should be increased to over 75% by 2030;
- Over 25% of higher education enrolments must be at post graduate level;
- Universities must produce more than 5000 Phds per year as against 1420 in 2010;
- The number of graduate, post graduate and first-rate scientists must be doubled;
- The number of African and women post graduates, especially Phds, must be increased;
- All forms of discrimination must be eliminated and a welcoming learning and research environment created.

There is wide agreement that rapidly increasing the number of “quality” Phds is crucial not only for equity and transformation reasons but also for a new generation of university researchers.

So, how could more robust international partnerships assist us to pursue these goals? USAf, DHET and DST need to sit together and design a set of partnership proposals that will support the training and graduation of thousands of researchers. Commonwealth countries with research intensive institutions should be approached to partner with South Africa

on such an initiative. South Africa's team should design the partnerships with due regard to the socio-economic sectors such as agriculture, ocean economy, advanced manufacturing, urban planning and rural development. Our team should also seek to develop research focus areas that encourage transdisciplinarity and access to a mix of discipline knowledge. Commonwealth should not exclude Africa and countries of the South. Our experience suggests there is much for us to learn about entrepreneurship from countries such as Somalia and Zimbabwe – we could collaborate with colleagues and institutions in such countries.

Of course focussing on international collaboration does include more deliberate attention to our own system improvement challenges. I am concerned that the former and still HBIs continue to struggle to attract leading researchers and teachers. They also find it difficult to attract post graduate students. Our initiatives should also address these challenges – lecturers from HBIs should be incentivised to pursue research excellence and quality teaching. We also need to address the lack of confidence that causes some of our academics to seek out predatory journals and the “silent majority” of non-research active PHDs discovered by Professor Mouton and team.

In response to these many and very diverse challenges the Department will focus on improving our ability to evaluate and monitor research. We are finalising two important policy frameworks that will give greater impetus to strengthening the university research landscape.

The first is a policy framework for internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa published last year for public comment. Most South African universities have actively sought out the establishment of international collaborations with universities beyond our borders either as an individual initiative or as part of regional or nationally initiated activities and there are numerous examples of these across the system. The benefits derived from these collaborations are huge as they ensure that South Africa plays a part in the global research and innovation eco

system, able to lead in some niche fields and deriving benefit from areas recognised as research strengths in other countries.

The second is the National Plan for Post School Education and Training that sets out a Framework for the differentiation of higher education institutions of a diverse set of institutions. The plan conceptualises differentiation at two levels:

The first being through mandate differentiations into four institutional types and the second by way of distinct institutional missions. A key proposition is that each institution will have a mission which would define its position within the overall system. It is anticipated that the process will lead to an institutional landscape comprised of strong, focussed and sustainable institutions. The plan suggests all institutions will teach, carry on research and engage in community outreach, they will also have a discernable identity; teaching intensive, research intensive or technology intensive. All institutions will strive for high quality in their chosen niche.

The differentiation framework is unusual in that institutions will be expected to chart their own development trajectory within the bounds of available resources and capacities and within the framework of dynamic regional, local and national development imperatives.

I have been told the universities are fully conversant with the framework document and I look forward to hearing their proposals on these two important documents and to implementing them with your support. Our ambitious vision 2030 higher education agenda as well as the Post school education and training White Paper require us to work together to build a high quality, competitive, globally connected and locally responsive university system;

I look forward to working with you to achieve this.