MINISTER

BASIC EDUCATION

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Programme Director,
Prof LenkaBula, Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa
Faculty and Staff of UNISA,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Molweni kuni nonke!

Thank you for inviting me to your wonderful campus. UNISA is one of our nation's most important institutions in shaping the next generation of teachers.

This morning, we meet at a truly extraordinary time. A once in a generation moment when South Africa, as the G20 President for 2025, has pledged to "take the G20 to the people."

This is not just a slogan. It is a deliberate strategy to root global policy debates in the lived realities of our communities and to take the people along in our policy formulation processes.

This starts in places like this, among the minds who train our future leaders, shape our pedagogies, and ultimately determine the futures of millions of South African professionals.

This gathering is purposeful. Every faculty of education represented here, whether serving urban centres, rural districts, or innovating through online platforms, plays a decisive role in building the backbone of our national development.

To UNISA, I want to also thank you for leading the charge in teacher education, producing teachers across every phase from Early Childhood Care and Education to the Foundation, Intermediate, Senior, FET and phases, as well as postgraduates and doctoral candidates. You are a national university but your reach is continental, and your influence, generational.

This conference aligns with two key G20 education priorities namely **Quality Foundational Learning** and **Professional Development for a Changing World**

Around the world, high-performing systems are showing us what is possible. In Finland, every teacher is a master's graduate. In Singapore, government and universities work as one to define and deliver excellence. These models are inspiring, but they cannot simply be transplanted here.

We must design a South African model—anchored in our realities, enriched by global best practice, and driven by our own vision for transformation.

Colleagues, our faculties of education hold a noble and urgent mandate: to prepare educators who are future-fit, contextually responsive, and professionally resilient.

The Department of Basic Education invests heavily in curriculum innovation, teacher development, and systemic reform. But for too long, our efforts have run alongside each other, not in full alignment. That must change.

We need a **shared stewardship** of the education system, where the DBE and universities operate not in parallel, but in true partnership. Where accountability is reciprocal, and leadership is collective.

There are at least six areas where stronger collaboration is needed:

1. **Policy Alignment and Responsiveness**
   We need continuous engagement between the DBE and universities. This ensures Initial Teacher Education programmes stay aligned with national priorities and adapt to emerging needs while also responding to the strategic reorientation of the basic education system to strengthen the foundations of learning. Universities must give us the skills we will need as we expand ECD access, strengthen foundational learning, and implement Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education.

2. **Professional Learning Communities**
   We must create spaces where DBE subject specialists and university academics collaborate regularly to strengthen how the curriculum is delivered. These communities will share cutting-edge practices, update methodologies, and strengthen the bridge between teacher preparation and classroom reality.

3. **Teacher Supply and Demand Planning**
   We need better alignment between teacher specialisations and our system's needs. Our Funza Lushaka bursary programme already targets high-demand subjects and hard-to-staff schools. But we are also prioritising Funza Lushaka bursaries for student teachers who want to pursue a career in the foundations of learning. This will help us to close the gap between oversupply in some areas and chronic shortages in others.

4. **Strengthening Work-Integrated Learning**
   Teaching practice is not a box-ticking exercise. It is the heart of preparation. The DBE, working with Provincial Education Departments, can help ensure school placements give students the right exposure, in the right contexts. Together, we can design practicum tools and mentoring frameworks that guarantee quality and consistency across the country.

5. **Seamless Induction and CPD Pathways**
   The transition from graduation to classroom is a vulnerable moment for new teachers. By aligning induction and CPD programmes with pre-service training, we can create a smooth, coherent path for professional growth—so that learning never stops at qualification.

6. **Joint Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research**
   The DBE collects vast system data, but universities have the expertise to interrogate it deeply. A shared research agenda, rooted in classroom realities, can ensure our reforms are grounded in evidence, not assumptions.

If we commit to these areas, we can:

- Align teacher education and national priorities;
- Treat teacher development as a lifelong continuum;
- Match teacher supply with demand through shared data; and
- Ensure CPD frameworks are rigorous and practical.

The G20 is asking for transformative leadership. That leadership must begin with us.

Our teachers are stepping into classrooms shaped by artificial intelligence, climate change, migration and economic uncertainty. G20 Priority 3 asks: Are we equipping them with the transversal skills, adaptability, and resilience they will need?

G20 Priority 1 asks an even deeper question: Are we getting the basics right? Quality foundational learning is not just an educational target – it is a moral imperative. Without it, every other reform is weakened. And achieving it depends on the teachers we prepare today. Teachers who are not only skilled and knowledgeable, but also agents of justice, inclusion and innovation.

This conference must not be remembered for eloquent speeches, but for the partnerships it forges and the commitments it inspires. Let us strengthen the compact between the Department of Basic Education and our universities—so that it is one that is more deliberate, practical and unshakably focused on impact than ever before.

Let us listen intently, speak boldly and act decisively.

As custodians of knowledge, let us meet this moment with rigour, creativity, and a refusal to accept mediocrity. If we do that, the ripple effects of our work here today will be felt not just in UNISA's lecture halls, but in every classroom in South Africa and far beyond.

Thank you.