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Speech by the Minister of Basic Education at the Announcement of the Appointment of the New Members of the National Education and Training Council (NETC)

Programme Director,
Deputy Minister of Basic Education,
Director-General and senior officials of the Department of Basic Education,
Members of the Media,
Importantly, the newly appointed members of the National Education and Training Council,

This morning, I have the pleasure of addressing you on a development that will shape the future of our basic education system.

This month, we have operationalised the National Education and Training Council for the first time – a step we have taken with the support of Cabinet.

Today, I will formally introduce you to the newly appointed members of the NETC and share with you the important work they will be doing.

Just over a year ago, I took office as Minister of Basic Education. Just twelve days after my appointment, I addressed Parliament and committed to operationalise the National Education and Training Council, to provide expert advice on education policies and reforms in the country.

It has been a year of hard work and significant reorientation. I am pleased to inform South Africans that we have delivered on that promise. Today, the NETC will hold its inaugural meeting at the Department of Basic Education's head office in Pretoria.

When I assumed this responsibility, I made it clear that South Africa's basic education system could not continue on the path of incremental adjustments. It needed a decisive shift in strategy, vision and energy.

Over the past year, we have initiated a number of key reforms:

- **Strengthening foundational learning**: We have placed literacy and numeracy at the centre of our national education agenda to ensure that every child can learn to read for meaning and calculate with confidence by the age of 10.

- **Teacher development and support**: We are reviewing the Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme to prioritise students who want to pursue a career in Foundation Phase teaching. We are also recalibrating teacher development initiatives into a coherent set of focused Foundation Phase offerings that will better ensure greater impact at scale.

- **Compulsory Grade R**: For the first time, Grade R is being systematically embedded as a compulsory part of the schooling system, with a clear focus on both access and quality. A significant milestone, but there is much work to be done to ensure universal access.

- **School safety and well-being**: We have signed a revitalised MoU with the South African Police Service to expand partnerships with law enforcement, provinces, communities and civil society to combat violence, crime and the scourge of extortion in schools.

These reforms are anchored in the recognition that basic education equips young people with the skills they need to pursue higher education opportunities, enter the job market or build their own businesses.

They also mark a shift from an overemphasis on matric results to a stronger focus on quality outcomes in the early years.

But transformation must be grounded in evidence. In a rapidly changing world, no government can rely solely on instinct or tradition to guide policy.

We need research, data, global best practice and advice from experts, to inform our decisions.

This is why evidence-led policymaking is so central to our reform agenda. It allows us to ask the right questions:

- Which interventions truly improve learning outcomes?
- How do we ensure limited resources are allocated equitably and effectively?
- What reforms will position South Africa's young people for success?

The answers to these questions cannot be generated by government alone. Good ideas do not belong to government alone. We require the insights of experts, the lived experience and expertise of practitioners, the wisdom of researchers, and the constructive critique of civil society. Our task is to govern wisely – guided by evidence, humility and an openness to knowledge.

It is in this spirit that I am proud today to formally announce the appointment of the new members of the **National Education and Training Council (NETC)**.

The Council consists of the following individuals:

1) Mrs Khathutshelo Onica Dederen

2) Dr Xolani Khohliso

3) Ms Zanele Mabaso

4) Ms Madimetja Dina Mamashela

5) Prof Judith McKenzie

6) Prof Paulus Jacobus Mentz

7) Mr Lebogang Stephen Montjane

8) Ms Mmatsetsweu Ruby Motaung

9) Prof Nicolette Roberts

10) Ms Maite Getrude Rammala

11) Ms Marie-Louise Samuels

12) Dr Selvia Kista (Mona) Singh

13) Dr Glodean Qondile Tintswalo Thani

14) Ms Penelope Vinjevold (Chairperson)

15) Dr Gabrielle Wills

The new members of the Council reflect a deliberate effort to bring together a wide spectrum of expertise in education policy, curriculum development and delivery, pedagogy and education management and governance.

It is important to emphasise that, in line with its founding regulations, the NETC is deliberately diverse but not constituency-based. Members contribute as individuals on the strength of their expertise and professional experience.

These new members bring with them decades of classroom experience, experience in our districts and education departments, and experience in academia. Some bring expertise on how technology can improve the quality of teaching and learning, while others have expertise in data collection and analysis across a range of topics, including education economics.

A summary of their credentials will be provided to you after this briefing.

This Council is deliberately diverse because our education system is diverse. Its members bring knowledge that is both local and global, both theoretical and practical.

The Council was established and is governed in terms of regulations promulgated in 2009 in terms of the **National Education Policy Act of 1996**. It is not a new invention, but rather a vital institution whose time has come to be at the forefront of our reform agenda.

Despite its establishment by law in 2009, this is the first time that the Council has been activated and is operational.

In terms of its mandate, the Council is tasked to:

- Advise the Minister of Basic Education on policy matters under section 3 of the National Education Policy Act, as well as matters referred to it by the Minister;
- Provide inputs on draft national education policy; and
- Report annually to the Minister on its activities.

The Council is not a decision-making body. Its role is advisory. Its strength lies in its independence, its depth of expertise, and its ability to enrich our policymaking with fresh and rigorous analysis of available evidence.

Furthermore, I am requesting this advisory body to provide me with a suggested implementation plan for each recommendation it will make. This is to ensure that solutions are not abstract but rather are firmly grounded in the realities of our resource constraints.

I must stress that the NETC does not replace existing statutory bodies, such as the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) or the Head of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM). Nor does it usurp the constitutional and legislative powers of government. In fact, the Council supplements the work of these bodies and of government.

The Council is designed to strengthen our decision-making. It is a sounding board, a source of evidence, and a forum for testing ideas before they are translated into policy. It is, in short, a mechanism to ensure that our reforms are not only bold, but also smart, equitable, implementable and sustainable.

I wish to thank all the organisations who submitted nominations during our public call for nominations. We received 119 nominations – a testament to the significance of this Council.

The Council is free to co-opt up to four additional members into their ranks and may appoint into ad hoc and standing committees individuals who may not be members but may have valuable experience and skills to help the Council discharge its functions.

I would like to encourage all those who were nominated to remain available to assist the NETC with its work when called upon.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to be clear about the immediate priorities I have asked the Council to advise me on. These priorities are not abstract. They are rooted in the urgent challenges facing our schools:

1. **Review of the current School Resourcing Model**: The current school resourcing system, rooted in the National Norms and Standards for School Funding and the quintile model, has achieved much in directing resources towards poorer schools. Yet, serious challenges remain.

   Too many schools face misclassification, inadequate per-learner allocations, unpredictable procurement of learning and teaching support materials, and persistent infrastructure backlogs.

Last month, for example, I visited a school in Glen Vista, Johannesburg. The school was classified as a quintile 5 school, solely on the basis that it was based in Glen Vista. But the reality is that the school serves children from families that are impoverished and should ordinarily qualify for higher financial support than present.

This highlights how quintile classifications (often based on community-level indices rather than school-level deprivation) can misclassify schools and in turn have adverse effects on resourcing across quintiles.

The Council must therefore advise on a strengthened model that is:

- **Fairer** – by updating targeting to ensure no child is disadvantaged by where they live or the size of their school;
- **Adequate and sustainable** – by defining a minimum package of resources that every learner, school, and teacher can rely on; and
- **Smarter** – by linking inputs to outcomes, ensuring that investment is tied to better reading, mathematics and learner achievement.

This is not simply about more money. It is about more intelligent use of our collective resources, so that every rand counts for every learner.

2. **Review of Assessment, Promotion and Progression Requirements**:

   For too long, public debate has been clouded by misconceptions about a so-called “30% pass rate”. This risks undermining confidence in our system, while distracting from the real issues. The truth is that assessment, progression and promotion policies exist to ensure that learners master knowledge and skills at each phase, from Grade R through to Grade 12.

   The Council must therefore provide advice on whether our current assessment, progression and promotion policies strike the right balance between high standards and realistic pathways. This requires:

   - **Synergy** – ensuring assessment, progression and promotion requirements for each of the four phases of schooling in South Africa are properly analysed and appropriately synthesised;
   - **Fairness** – ensuring that learners from disadvantaged contexts are not unfairly penalised while still holding firm to standards;
   - **Benchmarking** – reviewing international best practices in assessment, promotion and progression policies, especially in systems with comparable contexts, and assessing their applicability to South Africa;
   - **Alignment** – connecting school exit requirements to the demands of higher education and skills training; and
   - **Clarity** – ensuring that parents, learners and teachers know exactly what is expected.

In short, we must ask whether our assessment, progression and promotion policies prepare learners not just to move through grades, but to succeed in life.

3. **Reducing the Administrative Burden on Teachers**:
   Teachers are central to our system, yet too often their time is consumed by non-instructional administrative tasks that divert energy away from teaching.

   The Council's task is to therefore advise on practical reforms that:
   - **Cut duplication** – by streamlining reporting and removing low-value tasks;
   - **Redistribute and clarify roles** – including expanding the use of teaching assistants and administrative staff, where possible;
   - **Harness technology and process innovations** – to make compliance smarter, faster and less disruptive.

   Reducing non-instructional admin is not about lowering accountability – it is about respecting teachers as professionals and giving them back the time to teach our learners.

4. **Expanding Access to Quality Foundational Learning:**
   South Africa's most urgent education challenge is the crisis in early literacy and numeracy. Too many of our children reach Grade 4 unable to read with meaning or to apply basic mathematical concepts. Without these skills, they struggle in mathematics, science, and every other subject that builds on these foundations.

The Council must therefore advise on a minimum integrated package of support that every school offering the Foundation Phase must implement – a package that we can consider introducing as part of a national policy. This package should cover:

- **Core learning and teaching support materials** – ensuring every learner has the educational resources they need from the first day of school.
- **Teacher training and support** – identifying the best model for training teachers on literacy and numeracy in the Foundation Phase, particularly in classroom support and instruction in African languages.
- **Time for learning** – ensuring that sufficient, protected hours are devoted daily to reading and mathematics in every classroom.
- **Early assessment and intervention** – using effective assessment methods to identify learners at risk early and to provide targeted support.
- **Stronger integration and coherence** – aligning the efforts of the Department of Basic Education, provinces, districts and schools so that we end the fragmentation of multiple uncoordinated initiatives.

In addition, the Council's advice must guide us on how to ensure a smooth transition from Early Childhood Care and Education into compulsory Grade R, and on how to progressively strengthen mother tongue instruction in the early grades.

Without strong foundations in literacy and numeracy, other reforms cannot succeed. With them, every child has pathway to learning, opportunity and dignity.

These tasks are urgent, but they are also interconnected. Together, they represent the core of our mission: to inject quality, equity and resilience into South Africa's basic education system.

Colleagues, the appointment of the National Education and Training Council is more than an administrative milestone. It marks the start of a new era for policymaking in basic education in South Africa.

The reforms we want to launch are not temporary adjustments – they are meaningful changes that will enhance the basic education landscape for generations to come.

We are moving towards a system that:

- Prioritises outcomes over compliance;
- Values teachers as professionals, not administrators;
- Places literacy and numeracy at the heart of our efforts to improve education outcomes;
- Harnesses the power of technology and innovation responsibly and effectively; and
- Ensures that no child is left behind, regardless of where they are born or which school they attend.

Change of this scale will not be easy. It will test our resolve, our patience and our ability to work together. But with the wisdom of the Council, the dedication of teachers, the involvement of parents, and the support of society at large, I am confident that our system will not only endure but thrive.

In closing, allow me to speak directly to the members of the National Education and Training Council.

A sincere thank you for your willingness to contribute your expertise and your time to this important work. We are wishing you all the best as you convene for your inaugural meeting today.

You are entrusted with a responsibility to fearlessly provide advice grounded in evidence and aimed at the best interests of learners. Yours is not the task of government, but the task of knowledge, expertise and wisdom.

I urge you to approach this responsibility with courage, with creativity, and with the humility that comes from knowing that millions of children depend on our collective choices.

The Council’s work begins today – and with it, the opportunity to ensure that in every classroom, in every province, every child has not just a seat in school, but a genuine chance at success.

I thank you.