Minister Pandor's speech at the 2018 Siyaphumelela National Conference,

12 June 2018

It's a great pleasure to be here.

I'd like to thank the Kresge Foundation, and particularly Mr Bill Moses and his colleagues, for their long-term interest in and support for improving the South African university system.

The Foundation has invested substantially in a range of initiatives over recent years, including the Siyaphumelela Initiative.

Siyaphumelela – "we succeed" – emphasises the positive approach that we need to adopt to ensure that our university system continues to grow and strengthen.

The DHET supports the development of a strong public higher education system in South Africa, and seeks to do so through a range of steering mechanisms including policy, planning/programmes and funding.

Enabling student access to, and success in, university programmes is part of this mandate.

Student success has, and continues to be, a priority for government, the department and universities. In recent years, the earmarked Teaching Development Grants have enabled universities to implement innovative strategies to improve student success, including comprehensive First Year Experience programmes. The Foundation Provision programmes have enabled students to access extended curriculum support.

As a result of these and other strategies, we have seen an improvement in student success in some of our universities.

However, we cannot be satisfied with these levels of success, and we have to

intensify our efforts. The drop out levels remain high, poor university leadership in some institutions has led to continuing inadequate success rates. In many campuses racism, gender inequality and student alienation have intensified the problems.

The University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) represents the next stage of our collaborative efforts to enhance student success.

The UCDP adopts an integrated approach focused on student development, staff development and programme and curriculum development. If we are continue to improve student success in our university system, we need a coordinated and coherent approach that addresses all three areas.

Our student development and support initiatives must enable us to address logistical issues, psycho-social issues and learning and teaching issues that research has shown to improve student success. Our initiatives must also support self-drive, initiative and innovation.

A key logistical issue that has had a significant impact on student success is student funding.

The Department's latest 2015 undergraduate cohort study published on 31 March 2018 includes an analysis which compares success of all undergraduate students, students that have benefited from funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, and accounting students that have participated in the Thuthuka Programme where they benefit from adequate funding as well as a comprehensive wrap-around student support system.

The patterns are clear: funded students have a better success rate.

Students who are inadequately funded experience great challenges in regard to food security, suitable accommodation, and ability to obtain textbooks and other resources. These tend to be poor black working class students we need to develop models of funding and support that address their needs.

Government has chosen to introduce a full-cost bursary scheme for students whose family income is under R350,000 a year. We are implementing policy the ANC adopted in 2007.

I am optimistic that this new DHET bursary scheme will transform student success. We need to research its impact, and will be putting a longitudinal research study in place that investigates implementation over the next few years.

However, students also need additional academic support and I hope that universities will continue to provide it. Recent research on student expenses in our universities suggests much more work is needed to achieve transformation.

While we are on an upward trajectory, we still need to improve throughput rates.

We now have a collective responsibility in university education to ensure that most students graduate with a quality degree.

To do this means taking responsibility for our students' success. It means that we have to understand our student's needs.

Student analytics can help to develop this understanding, and help us to put data-informed initiatives in place to better support students toward success.

The Siyaphumelela Initiative has thus been a very welcome intervention and the five universities that are direct beneficiaries already demonstrate significant capacity in student analytics and in implementing data-informed student success initiatives.

Sophisticated systems are being built and used at the institutions, which build on student analytics, enable more appropriate student advice, and enable students to be directed to appropriate support initiatives.

I look forward to the improved student success that must result from these initiatives.

But we also have to think about how this capacity can be built across the university

system. We have to ensure that the other universities, who are not directly supported through the Siyaphumelela initiative, are also supported to develop this capacity.

Otherwise, we broaden the development gap between universities, we contribute to the further entrenchment of apartheid patterns, and we compromise our social justice agenda.

I look forward to learning how we can go about improving capacity across the system.

When students succeed, South Africa succeeds.

Thank you, and my best wishes for a productive conference that will assist in taking our student success agenda forward.