

# Free State student exchange programme bridges skills gap

In an effort to bridge the skills gap in the country, outgoing Free State Premier Ace Magashule says the key lies in taking advantage of international solidarity and exchange programmes.



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“As part of a programme of skills revolution and in line with our desire to benefit from international solidarity, we have sent a number of students to international universities and vocational colleges.

“It is our belief that these students, once they complete their studies, will be able to contribute immensely to the Free State and South Africa’s social and economic development,” said Magashule.

Magashule made these remarks at his last State of the Province Address (SOPA), which he delivered on Tuesday evening.

According to Magashule, over 1,200 Free State students are studying at various institutions across the world. The students are supported by the provincial government to study in various scarce skills fields such as including Medicine, Engineering, Nuclear Science and Agro-Processing.

“In the current financial year, 1 173 unemployed youth benefitted from our skills development programmes. I am also pleased to report that we currently have 448 young people enrolled in apprenticeship and learnership programmes,” said Magashule.

## **Medicine exchange programme**

According to Magashule, 117 of the 189 students currently studying medicine in Cuba will be returning to the country between June and July this year to complete the last 18 months of their studies.

All these students will be distributed in hospitals across the province as training sites.

“The remaining 68 students will be coming back home in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years. Once qualified, the students will be deployed to clinics in the rural and farming areas across the province.

“A further 97 students will be going to Brazil during March this year to do vocational training,” said Magashule.

## **Specialised skills given preference**

According to Magashule, an Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) hub, which was announced in the previous SOPA, will open its doors this year.

“In this regard, I am happy to announce that the skills academy of the Free State in Maccauwei has been established and will open its doors to learners, students and ICT practitioners this year.

“The skills academy will deliver cutting edge quality ICT skills and accredited training programs.

“These specialised skills are necessary to drive the Free State growth and development strategy and position the province as a strategic national and international competitor in the sector,” said Magashule.

The skills academy will have the curriculum of countries such as India, China, Rwanda, Brazil and will partner with Microsoft and Vodacom.

## **Higher Education Funding**

According to Magashule, the number of bursaries awarded to students increased from only 129 in 2009 to more than 8,000 currently.

“The Free State Provincial Government has contributed towards increasing access to higher education, especially for the poor and working class.

“Investment on bursaries increased from only R5.4 million in 2009 to more than R400 million in 2015 and over R330 million currently,” said Magashule

The provincial government said it is in the process of developing a policy that will guide the administration to evaluate its ability to support students who come from poor households.

The Premier said the provincial government would use the available resources to enhance its contribution towards the fee-free higher education agenda of the ANC and its government.

“We express gratitude to President Jacob Zuma for the pronouncement on fee-free higher education for the poor and working class. We congratulate President Ramaphosa for implementing on this resolve,” said Magashule.

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