

# The Academy for Environmental Leadership SA signs MoU with Sol Plaatje University

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The Academy for Environmental Leadership SA (AEL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate with Sol Plaatje University (SPU), heralding the formation of an academic node of higher learning in the Northern Cape. Amongst other benefits, the MoU allows the AEL to serve as a pipeline for qualifying students to register at SPU and for SPU to channel learners eligible to enrol at the AEL.



"We are very excited to embark on this new partnership with Sol Plaatje University, recognising that we share similar values as academic institutions that truly uphold excellence. The Northern Cape has much to offer to the country, and strengthening the academic offering in the province will benefit the nation and add value to addressing the skills shortage in our country," stated Ms Heidi Bartis, CEO at AEL.

The senior management team at SPU recently met with representatives from AEL, including CEO Heidi Bartis, head of Academic Programmes Dr Matthys Strydom, and lecturer in Conservation Ecology Dr Derick Forbanka. The institutions have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance collaboration. The discussions focused mainly on developing an implementation plan to bring this agreement to fruition as the terms of the MoU unfold.

"For us, sharing academic access, learning infrastructure, and assets is an exciting part of the collaboration," said Prof Crouch, vice chancellor and principal of Sol Plaatje University. "The MoU allows us and AEL to cooperate in research and development, teaching and learning and community interaction, exchange of lecturers, supervising SPU post-graduate students, and designing, facilitating, and hosting short courses."

As part of the Northern Cape academic node offering, the AEL's Higher Certificate in Conservation Ecology will serve as an alternative access route for admission to SPU in selected cognate programmes, subject to the applicant meeting the minimum requirements for admission.

The agreement allows for mutual recruitment benefits for both institutions. "As the AEL, we will do our part to promote the

SPU as a destination of choice for learners who complete the NQF5 Higher Certificate in Conservation Ecology qualification or the Access for Success Programme. The SPU will, in turn, assist us via its Student Recruitment Unit with the application process," Bartis adds.

The SPU will ringfence a certain number of applicant places each year for learners who complete the AEL Access for Success Programme, which focuses on improving Grade 12 mathematics and physical science to embark on Stem study programmes and meet the SPU admission criteria.

"As the AEL, we want to be a knowledge hub in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa for the benefit of all its inhabitants. To support this, we are making our Duin-in-die-Weg and Uizip campuses available as research centres and data collection areas," added Bartis.

"It means the SPU can use the AEL campuses for outreach actions to local communities and other initiatives such as information days, short courses, winter and summer schools, etc. It will accommodate break-away camps and conferences for SPU management and students," she adds.

This collaboration shows the potential to offer more significant opportunities for further study in the province, and students from across South Africa are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities by applying for admission at either the AEL or SPU to further their academic studies.

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