

## **SAIAB extension opening lunch for the Deputy-Minister of Science and Technology**

23 MARCH 2007

The Honourable Deputy Minister of Science and Technology, Mr. Derek Hanekom

The Director and officials of SAIAB

Mayor Kate and MECs

Officials of the Department of Science and Technology

The Chair, President and members of the Board of the National Research Foundation

The Director of SciFest

Deans and heads of department of Rhodes University and other colleagues

Invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Molweni and welcome to this lunch in celebration of the opening of the extension to SAIAB, which Rhodes University is pleased to host.

To those from outside our town and province, welcome also to iRhini/Grahamstown and to Rhodes University.

Minister, your time is limited and there are many demands on it. We are therefore grateful that there will be an opportunity after lunch to briefly introduce you to certain areas of scientific work at Rhodes University.

As a prelude to your walk-around later, permit me to make a few observations about Rhodes University and our place in the higher education, science and technology landscape.

With just under 6 000 students we are the smallest university in South Africa. There are, however, a number of features that make us distinctive among South African universities.

1. Almost 1 in 4 of our students are international students – mainly from the rest of Africa - which makes us a cosmopolitan institution
2. Almost 1 in 4 are also postgraduate students, which means that there is a continuous infusion of young intellect and talent into our scientific endeavours
3. 50% of our students live in one of our 42 residences and have meals in our 9 halls. This residential system is an important part of our success
4. We enjoy a deserved reputation for excellence and indeed have the best pass rates and graduation rates in the country.

5. Our academics have the best per capita research output, which means we are extremely productive in scientific research and output. In a number of disciplines and fields we are at the frontiers of research and knowledge production and the production of a new generation of scientists and researchers.

Research Chair – Prof. Nyokong - DST  
National facility in nanotechnology - MINTEK  
New facility in plant species

Await with anticipation results of new Chairs in April  
Vigorously pursue further chairs in which we have proven expertise

Shape and size

Strain on facilities – teaching and research infrastructure; library; residences

R 80 m from DoE welcome

Next decade of building on intellectual foundations and extending and enhancing this in quantitative and qualitative terms

In as much as have noted promising initiatives in science and technology, similar opportunities in humanities and social sciences.

Mellon \$ 640 000  
Chair in humanities  
New centres for research programme on democracy, and expansion into pro-poor social policy research

Emphasise this for two reasons

SA challenge = economic growth and development, social equity and consolidation of democracy  
Tagore – knowledge makes us powerful but empathy/sympathy makes us human

National system of innovation tends to be reduced to natural science, technology and engineering

Unfortunate and dangerous because science, technology and engineering on their own cannot create the society that we wish to build and will not address all our social challenges.

In the context of an underdeveloped society and its historical legacy and challenges the humanities and social sciences are hugely important!

Therefore, alongside maintaining and enhancing our excellence in the natural sciences, we believe that we are well-placed to also accelerate our development in the humanities and social sciences and that the goal of becoming the best humanities faculty in the next ten years is an achievable goal.

Finally, as a university we are also acutely that the value and importance of science and technology, research and knowledge must be felt and experienced by surrounding communities. This region and town has major economic and social challenges and our science and activities must connect on the concrete problems of the day. There are and will continue to be discussions with the mayor and municipality, and local schools on partnerships and co-operation that can be of mutual benefit to Rhodes

With those words, I wish you a pleasant lunch and I trust that you will have an enjoyable post-lunch visit of Rhodes.