



## **POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA**

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WELCOME REMARKS

BY

**PROF TJAMA TJIVIKUA**

***RECTOR: POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA***

ON

THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING OF THE MEMORANDUM OF  
UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE POLYTECHNIC OF NAMIBIA AND  
THE NAMIBIA STUDENTS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FUND (NSFAF)

ON

22 APRIL 2014

**11:30**

**POLYTECHNIC HOTEL SCHOOL**

Head of NSFAF Secretariat, Mrs Hilya Nghiwete

NSFAF Management and Staff

Polytechnic Management and Staff

Students of the Polytechnic

All Esteemed Invited Guests

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to see all of you here today gathered for the occasion of the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF) and the Polytechnic of Namibia. A warm welcome to Ms Hilya Nghiwete and her delegation to this ceremony.

You will recall that at the Polytechnic's Academic Opening in February of this year, certain past and current NSFAF bursary holders, raised their concerns publicly when they could not register with us. Their problems emanated from long-running and unresolved problems of students' funding by NSFAF. I remember many extended discussions with and at the Ministry of Education on funding and mechanisms for funding. These are for instance the following:

1. **Late payments** of bursaries – this has been forcing the Polytechnic to change its systems in order to accommodate NSFAF loan holders, especially at times of Exams and Registrations when it's the most hectic time.
2. **Record Keeping** – NSFAF and the Polytechnic need to have the same information on their systems for loan holders to avoid sending students back and forth.
3. **Refunds** – the Polytechnic has done its best to accommodate refunding NSFAF students but this has taken extra resources as the Polytechnic was not prepared nor adequately staffed for such a major task, thus complaints from students or parents painting a negative picture of our system.

4. **Misunderstandings on continuing students that may qualify for loans** – This

It is our anticipation, therefore, that the signing of this agreement will help solve these problems.

Ladies and gentlemen

Some three weeks ago Steven Mintz<sup>1</sup>, Executive Director of the University of Texas System's Institute for Transformational Learning, reported that there were four forces that in combination have caused disruption in public higher education such that the system is under severe stress and these are: *a) behavioural, b) demographic, c) financial, and d) political forces*. Hence other academics like Brian Alexander<sup>2</sup>, Senior Fellow at the National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education speaks of the higher education peak as a result of unwillingness of the American family, following the economic depression, to spend money on tuition and other costs as well as that institutions now admitting first-generation students who require extensive support, which put pressure for increases in tuition and other fees. In the Namibian context the peak higher education situation would have arisen even before higher education had taken root.

However, the various legislative and policy frameworks that advocated equitable access to higher education and the instigation of instruments such as NSFAP intended to increase participation of marginalised and disadvantaged communities obviated the peak. This is shown by an almost fourfold increase in NSFAP funding since 2007.

Given the above, the Polytechnic and NSFAP share a common purpose in their respective mandates. Whereas the Polytechnic is mandated to offer higher education and training to qualifying students, especially Namibians, NSFAP on the other hand, is mandated to administer funds for many of the students who otherwise would not have been able to afford their studies at tertiary institutions. The Polytechnic has been administering bursary/loan funds which on accumulative basis have reached a total of over N\$**615** million. In this regard the Polytechnic

has been working closely with the funding institutions, initially the Ministry of Education and now NSFAF.

With the developments in the NSFAF scheme and in response to the needs of the students, benefits such as accommodation, books and transport were introduced. Since these benefits are paid together with the tuition fees, this poses a serious challenge to the institution as it means that the institution is expected to refund some of the benefits to the student. This has not been an easy exercise as Polytechnic does not have the capacity or enough personnel to handle the refunding process. Nonetheless, the work had to be carried out, but not without criticism from students who needed their refunds as in yesterday. This was exacerbated by the fact that the number of students awarded support (either in the form of scholarships or loans) by NSFAF has also significantly increased from 800 in 1998 to over 4,500 presently, possibly with the necessary improvements in the administrative structure or processes at NSFAF. Therefore, there is a need to find better and efficient ways to manage the administrative processes and payment of NSFAF refunds.

Other challenges have been a cumbersome manual system especially in the earlier years, duplication of payments, procedures that were not formally communicated and other misunderstandings. These will hopefully now be issues of the past. Despite all these challenges, Polytechnic has managed to successfully utilise NSFAF funds for its intended purpose.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, the Polytechnic and NSFAF by signing an MOU are indicating that both our organisations have structured our systems to add value to the chain from release of funding by government to the point where the students can access the funds for their studies. Through the MoU the two parties are putting in place modalities that will ensure greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the administration of NSFAF funds and clearly stipulates what is expected of each

party to avoid the misunderstandings of the past. The Polytechnic will always be willing to work with NSFAF so that we could find speedy resolution to any issue that might arise.

With this in mind I would like to appeal to NSFAF for having taken the decision to lift the prohibition of support for Polytechnic students studying towards the Bachelor degrees in English and Communication. These degrees are important contributions to national development, through the development of English language and Communication skills of various professional categories, such as teachers and communication workers in general. This gesture is important to the Polytechnic and stems from the many interactions that we have had between our institutions and proves that communication is a crucial vehicle for reaching common understanding and thus building stronger relationships, and also the economy of this country.

Finally, NSFAF can be proud of the many students that have successfully completed their programmes at the Polytechnic and are now contributing to the economic development of our country, which without funding could not have been possible.

It has been a long journey and so penning this Memorandum of Understanding brings the Polytechnic and NSFAF to a better understanding and relationship between. I therefore wish to welcome you all to the signing ceremony of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Polytechnic and NSFAF.

I thank you.

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### **References**

1. Steven Mintz. (2014). <http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-beta/four-emergent-higher-education-models#ixzz2ys7EG9Uq>.
2. Brian Alexander. (2014). *Inside Higher Education*, 7 April 2014.