



# press release

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## **BPSA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PARTNERS WITH WITS UNIVERSITY IN ITS TARGETED TALENT PROGRAMME**

In the South African higher education sector, there is growing concern about the poor retention and throughput rates of undergraduate students. With the quality of schooling unlikely to change dramatically in the short term, universities need to look at ways to improve student success, particularly in maths, science and engineering, in which there is a scarcity of skills.

The BPSA Education Foundation appreciates the importance of excellent skillsets in these subjects, which are key to the unlocking the country's potential, creating employment and ensuring that it remains competitive within the world economy.

As such, the BPSA Foundation is integrally involved in supporting the development of skills in the critical disciplines of maths and science across the country, through a successful partnership with Wits University and its Targeting Talent Programme (TTP). The Wits TTP is a programme that aims to increase the academic, social and psychological preparation and performance of selected learners at tertiary level, with specific focus on the subjects of science and maths.

For the past three years, as part of the Wits TTP initiative, the BPSA Education Foundation has been funding academically talented learners from high schools in remote rural communities in Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, to participate in the programme. This direct involvement between Grades 10 – 12 gives them the opportunity to hone their maths and science skills.

During the current Wits TTP intake, the BPSA Education Foundation is hosting 659 students for a residential academic enrichment camp at Wits Campus. Starting on 08 July and running until 21 July, this intensive, two-week educational programme with its focus on the maths, science and language curricula, is designed to develop both the cognitive skills and dispositional attributes required to cope with the demands of university-level study.

The BPSA Foundation has committed R105-million over five years into the TTP partnership, with R45-million having been spent to date. This year R15m will be spent to enrich the lives of just under 1 000 students, 60 educators and 26 schools.

“We acknowledge that maths and science skills are the new global currency, hence our emphasis on developing knowledge and excellence in these areas through sustained efforts and investment in the selected learners. During the programme, we equip these students with the necessary life skills to succeed during their tertiary studies and in the workplace, whilst creating a much-needed employment pipeline of successful graduates and future professionals that not only BP, but other corporates in South Africa can benefit from and tap into,” says Mokoena Motukuane, BPSA Foundation CEO.

In addition, the Educator Enrichment Programme for maths and science educators from the participating schools aims to upgrade their subject-specific, subject-didactic and curriculum-specific knowledge.

“Upgrading their technical dexterity better equips educators to create their own learning material to benefit all learners at their schools. The programme also encourages the creation of professional learning communities amongst educators, who share in the dissemination and generation of this knowledge material,” comments Motukuane.

“This intervention is already yielding positive results, with the 2016 pass rate in maths and science amongst the Wits TTP learners exceeding that of their private school peers. The number of distinctions they achieved in maths and science for the 2016 matric exams were 33% and 38% respectively, compared to 3% and 4% respectively for the national [and Independent Examinations Board (IEB)] figures.”

In 2015, to complement its investment in the Wits TTP programme, the BPSA Foundation initiated a scholarship programme with Wits University and a year later extended it to the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the aim of which is to provide these learners with the relevant tools to achieve academic success at university. The scholarships’ support interventions include tuition, accommodation, meals, tutoring and mentoring for professional, personal and social development, to better equip the students to achieve holistic success at the end of their academic careers.

The scholarship fund is valued at almost R17-million and funds 66 students. Now in its third intake cycle, 79% of the current students have achieved their next level of study - a performance that is well above Wits University’s average pass rate of 66% for 2016.

The mentoring and tutoring components of the scholarship programme ensure that the students have individual support to assist them either professionally or personally with any issues they might be facing. The aim of these components is to also provide the student with the opportunity to demonstrate initiative and utilise the tools provided to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition to the support structures offered, students are required to attend mandatory scholarship meetings that facilitate direct engagement and interaction between the students and the BPSA Education Foundation project manager.

“Maths and science are key to unlocking Africa’s potential. As such, we at BPSA have taken the initiative to play a tangible and meaningful role in creating and nurturing talent to sustain this country for generations to come. For any country engaged in nation-building, it must first produce logical minds. In other words, if a nation is to achieve socio-economic stability and sustainable development, then education – inclusive of all areas of knowledge – must be taken seriously,” adds Motukuane.

ENDS

#### **Notes to editors:**

In 2014 BP South Africa (BPSA) sold 25% + 1 share to two BEE partners, namely KAPELA and the BPSA Education Foundation, a Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Trust.

Kapela acquired a 20% +1 share and the BPSA Education Foundation acquired 5% of BPSA’s shares. The Foundation started operating in 2015, and contributes to meaningful and sustainable ways to enhance the standard of living and improve the well-being of previously disadvantaged, specifically black women and people with disabilities, through education and skills development.

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