



**SPEAKING NOTES FOR EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON
DR SUNSHINE MYENDE**

**SCIENCE AND INNOVATION CAREER EXPO
UMKHANYAKUDE, KZN**

24 JULY 2026



SPEAKING NOTES BY THE EXECUTIVE

CHAIRPERSON OF THE NYDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE SCIENCE AND INNOVATION EXPO – *Message of Support* | ±10 minutes

24 July 2026

Programme Director,

Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr Nomalungelo Gina;

Distinguished guests;

Representatives from government, academia, industry and civil society;

Teachers, parents and guardians;

And above all, the young people of uMkhanyakude

Good morning.

There are moments in the life of a nation that quietly shape its future. They are not always marked by grand ceremonies or historic announcements. Sometimes, they happen in halls like this one, where a young person discovers a career they had never imagined, asks a question that changes the direction of their life, or meets someone who helps them believe that their dreams are possible.

Today is not simply about careers. It is about possibility. It is about expanding horizons. It is about ensuring that the circumstances into which a young person is born do not become the limits of what they can become.

Allow me to express my sincere appreciation to Deputy Minister Dr Nomalungelo Gina and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation for bringing together this important Career Expo under the theme, "Igniting Future Careers: Science for Society." It is a theme that speaks not only to innovation, but to our collective responsibility to prepare young people for a rapidly changing world.

When we speak about science, technology and innovation, we are not speaking only about laboratories, research facilities or sophisticated machines. We are speaking about solving real problems. We are speaking about improving healthcare in our communities, strengthening food security, responding to climate change, building safer infrastructure, developing digital solutions for entrepreneurs and creating industries that generate sustainable employment.



Science, in its truest form, is about improving the quality of human life. And that is why it belongs to every young South African - not only those in our cities, but also those growing up in rural communities such as uMkhanyakude.

For too long, geography has determined opportunity. Too many talented young people have believed that because they were born far from economic centres, excellence was reserved for someone else. Yet history continues to remind us that brilliance knows no postcode. Talent is not concentrated in metropolitan areas. It exists in every village, every township, every informal settlement and every rural community across our country.

The responsibility before us is therefore not to create talent. Our responsibility is to create opportunities for that talent to flourish.

To the learners gathered here today, particularly those in Grades 9 to 11, you are standing at one of the most important crossroads of your lives. The decisions you make over the next few years will influence the careers you pursue, the skills you acquire and the contribution you will make to society.

Do not choose a career simply because it is familiar. Choose a career that challenges you to grow. Choose a career that allows you to solve problems. Choose a career that serves your community while fulfilling your purpose. And above all, never allow anyone to convince you that your dreams are too ambitious.

To the young people who are currently out of school, I want you to hear this clearly: your journey is not over.

Education does not only happen inside a classroom. Every day presents another opportunity to acquire new skills, pursue training, start a business, embrace technology or reconnect with pathways that lead towards employment and economic participation.

Your current circumstances do not define your future.

At the National Youth Development Agency, this belief guides everything we do. Our mandate is not simply to provide services. Our mandate is to unlock potential.

Whether through entrepreneurship support, grant funding, business development services, career guidance, digital skills programmes, volunteerism, employment readiness initiatives or partnerships that expand opportunities for young people, we are working to ensure that every young South African has a fair opportunity to participate meaningfully in the economy.



As the 5th Board of the NYDA, we have committed ourselves to building an agency that is accessible, responsive and inclusive. We recognise that meaningful youth development cannot be achieved if opportunities remain concentrated in only a few parts of our country.

That is why we continue strengthening our reach into rural communities, ensuring that access to opportunity is not determined by where a young person lives, but by the potential they possess.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The future world of work will look remarkably different from the one we know today.

Artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, renewable energy, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing and the digital economy are already transforming industries across the globe. Many of the careers our young people will occupy over the next twenty years do not yet exist today.

This reality should not intimidate us. It should inspire us. Because South Africa does not simply need young people who can adapt to the future. We need young people who will create it.

That is precisely why platforms such as this Career Expo are indispensable. They expose young people to possibilities they may never have encountered. They connect aspiration with information. They transform uncertainty into direction. They remind every learner walking through these exhibition stands that success is not accidental - it is built through preparation, curiosity, resilience and continuous learning.

I also wish to acknowledge the parents, guardians and educators who continue to invest their time, energy and sacrifices into nurturing the next generation. Your encouragement often becomes the foundation upon which young people build their confidence. Never underestimate the power of believing in a child before they believe in themselves.

Deputy Minister,

Today's gathering demonstrates something profoundly important. When government institutions, educational institutions, industry and communities work together, we move beyond conversations about youth development, we begin creating the conditions that make youth development possible.



The National Youth Development Agency is proud to stand alongside the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation in this shared mission of investing in young people.

Because when we invest in the minds of young people, we are investing in the future competitiveness of our economy. When we expose young people to opportunity, we strengthen social mobility. When we equip young people with knowledge and skills, we build more resilient communities. And when we believe in young people, we build a nation capable of achieving far more than it ever imagined.

To every young person here today, I leave you with this thought. The future will not belong to those who waited for opportunity to arrive. It will belong to those who prepared themselves when opportunity came knocking. May today be the beginning of that preparation. May today ignite new dreams. May today inspire bold ambitions.

And may each of you leave here knowing that your future is not determined by where you come from, but by the courage to pursue where you are capable of going.

The National Youth Development Agency remains your partner in that journey.

I thank you.