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HANDELSMERKBESTUUR

# New SANRAL Chair in Science, Mathematics and Technology Education

Prof Loyisa Jita appointed as the first UFS SANRAL Chair.

The University of the Free State (UFS) in partnership with the South African National Roads Agency launched the SANRAL Chair in Science, Mathematics and Technology Education on the Bloemfontein Campus on 11 September 2014.

Prof Loyisa Jita has been appointed as the first SANRAL Chair. He is a professor in the School of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Technology at the UFS, where he shares his expertise in science teaching, which has been influenced by his broad and deep intellectual and experiential engagements both internationally and domestically.

Speaking at the event were Prof Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the UFS; Dr Choice Makhetha, Vice-Rector: External Relations; Prof Jita, the inaugural SANRAL Chair; the Free State MEC for Police, Roads and Transport, Mr Butana Komphela and Mr Nazir Alli, CEO of SANRAL.

At the event, Prof Jansen celebrated that “SANRAL has rewarded the faith in our children to do well in science and mathematics with this Chair.”

This SANRAL Chair in Science, Mathematics and Technology Education will help to improve the quality of teaching in these vital subjects at schools in the province. It complements the university’s School Partnership Project (SPP) – a flagship initiative launched by Prof Jansen.

The SPP addresses concerns about underperformance in South Africa’s school system despite the fact that the country spends a greater proportion of the Gross Domestic Product on education than any other African country.

In 2011 the university launched the project in 22 township and rural schools in the Free State with the objective of assisting partner schools in building an ethos in which optimal teaching

and learning can take place. It provides customised training and support to teachers and learners, as opposed to generic interventions.

An important aim is to ensure that learners with the potential to grow and excel remain within the rural and township schools rather than having to leave their local environment to attend schools in better-resourced communities.

High school learners who benefit from this initiative will become part of a talent pool from which the next generation of engineers, teachers, artisans and technicians will be drawn.

The SANRAL endowment will enable the university to hone in on the ‘gateway subjects’ of mathematics and natural science. At school level, it will help to train teachers, support student-teacher interns, and incentivise education results so that participating schools become centres of excellence. At an academic level, the SANRAL Chair will supervise a cohort of doctoral and masters students, while also guiding research and publications in mathematics, science and technology education.

This endowment confirms SANRAL’s commitment to the growth of young talent with a specific focus on the country’s long-term needs to grow proficiencies in the above-mentioned subjects.

Through the endowment, SANRAL will assist the UFS in producing education leaders who can turn around maths and science education in disadvantaged schools throughout Southern Africa.