

DCS and Unisa solidify partnership with MoU

DCS and the University of South Africa (Unisa) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at the Unisa Pretoria campus on Friday, 9 June 2017 in a move to further cement and formalise their partnership. The MoU seeks to provide access to much-needed learning, and administrative support to offenders studying through Unisa. The partnership, which has already led to the establishment of Unisa learning hubs in correctional facilities, was finally sealed when the Chief Deputy Commissioner Incarceration and Corrections James Smalberger, who was standing in for National Commissioner Zach Modise, and Unisa's Principal and Vice Chancellor Professor Mandla Makhanya inked the deal.

Professor Makhanya narrated a story of a number of eminent persons who at certain points in their lives studied with Unisa while incarcerated. These luminaries include former President Nelson Mandela and the retired Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke. He mentioned that the University's archive department has kept hand-written assignments of former President Mandela in their original form. He indicated that the signing of the MoU was long overdue and that he was confident that it will yield tangible results, especially given the long-standing relationship that has existed between the university and the department that stretch back to the time when DCS was still known as the Department of Prisons.

CDC Smalberger, a former Unisa student himself, said the White Paper on Corrections requires that systematic efforts be made to ensure the rehabilitation of offenders. "As part of the process of learning through rehabilitation, the department has prioritised the education and skills of offenders", Smalberger said. He also indicated that education and skills development are central components of sentence plans for offenders serving sentences of more than 24 months. He cited President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Address earlier this year, in which he said one of the country's strategies to fight crime is to ensure that those who are released from custody do not reoffend. "Thus, it is important that we provide inmates with educational opportunities that are aligned and integrated to the South African basic and higher education systems", he added.

The establishment of DCS-Unisa Hubs in 2014 provides enhanced learning opportunities to offenders furthering their studies with Unisa. The hubs enable offenders to have access to laptops with Internet, Unisa library materials, tutorial services and on-line submission of assignments. This initiative is already yielding results. In October last year (2016), 15 offenders graduated with diplomas and degrees at Durban Management Area at Unisa special graduation ceremony.

A total of 14 hubs were established in the following Correctional Centres:

- Johannesburg (4)
- Kgoši Mampuru II (2)
- Durban (2)
- Barberton (1)
- Losperfontein (1)
- East London (1)
- Brandvlei (1)
- Qalakabusha (1)
- Rooigrond (1)