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## **UCT celebrates Eskom-university collaboration to develop skills**

**Please cite Professor Danie Visser, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation**

The University of Cape Town is very excited to be hosting Phase 2 of the Eskom Power Plant Engineering Institute (EPPEI). The agreement bringing it into being was signed and launched on 16 July 2016, at the Sandton Convention Centre in the presence of the Minister of Public Enterprises, the Honourable Lynne Brown; the Chair of the Board of Eskom, Dr Ben Ngubane; the Group Chief Executive of Eskom, Mr Brian Molefe; Mr Matshela Koko of Eskom, who had a key role in creating EPPEI; and representatives of all the partner universities.

This is a consortium created between Eskom and six South African universities, working with universities of technology. The six formal partner universities are UCT, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Pretoria, North-West University, Stellenbosch University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, but a number of other universities and universities of technology are also involved (University of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela University, the University of Venda as well as Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology, Tshwane University of Technology and Durban University of Technology). So this is a truly broad-based South African partnership and, although only some universities are currently signatories to the agreement, which has produced eight specialisation centres, it is expected that a number of other South African universities will also become involved to roll out further specialisation centres.

A collaborative approach is an absolute necessity to address the unprecedented challenges and risks currently faced by the energy-supply and power-transmission industry, which is rapidly transitioning in a context of global uncertainty in the power sector. Like all the most difficult challenges facing our world today, these problems can no longer be solved without an interdisciplinary approach and without multiple skills being brought to bear on them. EPPEI is an excellent example of bringing diverse skills together to achieve common goals – and Eskom has shown inspired leadership by creating this imaginative consortium.

The goals of EPPEI Phase 2, which involves an investment of R150 million by Eskom (after an investment of R129 million in Phase 1), are as follows:

- To use this inter-university research and training platform to develop skilled power-generation engineers at undergraduate and postgraduate level – and indeed to contribute to inter-university qualification development (Phase 2 not only aims to

produce more than 300 Master's degrees and PhDs, but also more than 300 graduates at postgraduate diploma and honours level, in courses relevant to the power industry – as well as 1000 BTech graduates – to close the skills gap that has developed in our country;

- To go beyond the training of engineers by also contributing to creating the next generation of academics for the sector, while working closely with industry;
- To inject new life into research areas related to power-plant engineering by developing inter-university research programmes; and
- To begin to create the ability for South Africa to reduce its current dependence on power-plant equipment supplied from Europe.

This programme takes a holistic view in the development of home-grown skills to improve the competitiveness of our country within the world economy. However, it is also open to the rest of our region and continent, and it will increasingly involve partners from other African countries.

By radically ramping up our capacity in respect of power-plant engineering, this programme will ensure that the economy of our country and our region can flourish as it should, and we hope that others in industry will join Eskom in making this vital cog in our long-term economic future a sustainable pan-African reality.

***ENDS***

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