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MANAGING EDITOR
Peter Tlouane

EDITOR
Johannes Selepe

JOURNALISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS
Reuben Maake
Malatji Monyelegwete
Lebogang Mathaba

CADET PHOTOGRAPHERS
Frans Nkhapele
Forgive Hlungwani
Mohau Seleka

CADET JOURNALISTS
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Rinae Manenzhe
Lesego Maaba
Phishego Mohubedu
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Jostinah Mamabolo

REPROGRAPHICS MANAGER
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GRAPHIC DESIGNERS
Macdonald Motlane
Khwela Siziwe

PRINTING AND PACKAGINGS
Paulina Rapheso
Diphete Banyatsang
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Fortunate Chiloane
Pumia Ubisi

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Contact Details:

Tel: 015 268 3210 / 2121
Fax: 015 267 0485
Email: ulPublications@ul.ac.za
Website: www.ul.ac.za

    
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R5 million partnership to strengthen Limpopo's potato industry, support emerging farmers

University of Limpopo and Kgodiso Development Fund invest in student bursaries, farmer training and agricultural research to improve food production and rural livelihoods

By Malatji Monyelegwete – malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za



Photos
Frans Matlala

Kgodiso Development Fund Chairperson Alfred Setlakalane, and University of Limpopo Vice-Chancellor and Principal Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele reaffirm their commitment to a partnership that will strengthen agricultural research, support emerging farmers and develop future leaders in the potato industry.

A R5 million investment by the Kgodiso Development Fund (KDF) will support student bursaries, agricultural research and farmer development through a partnership with the University of Limpopo (UL)

Announced during a stakeholder engagement between the University and the KDF Board, the funding will support the University Enhanced Bursary and Farmer Development Initiative. The programme combines research and practical farmer training to address skills shortages, improve potato production and strengthen rural livelihoods in Limpopo.

The funding will provide bursaries for students while helping emerging farmers gain access to training and technical support from university researchers.

Professor Victor Mmbengwa from UL's School of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences said the partnership would give farmers access to research expertise and practical skills to improve productivity.

"The investment will provide on-site skills development and practical training for emerging farmers, helping to build sustainable agricultural entrepreneurs and a skilled workforce in the potato industry across Limpopo, particularly in the province's major potato-producing areas," he said.

The programme will also support research into challenges facing the agricultural sector while strengthening collaboration between researchers, industry and farming communities.

KDF Chairperson Alfred Setlakalane said the Fund's investment is intended to strengthen agriculture by linking scientific research with practical farming.

"Farmers are at the centre of this initiative. Our goal is to empower committed farmers with the science and research they need to reach their full potential," he said.

He added that the fund is also investing in young people pursuing careers in agriculture through bursaries and educational opportunities.

The partnership will provide bursaries to 25 final-year BSc Agricultural Science students and five postgraduate students. It will also fund an eight-month capacity-building programme for 50 smallholder potato farmers across Limpopo.

UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele said the partnership would strengthen collaboration between academics, researchers and farming communities.

"As the university, we are committed to using our expertise in crop production and soil science to improve farming practices. We also propose the establishment of a Research Chair focusing on potato production and soil science to advance research and support the growth of the sector," said Dr Mabelebele.

He also welcomed opportunities to introduce short learning programmes for emerging farmers and thanked the Kgodiso Development Fund for supporting students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

KDF Executive Director Tilo Diale said Limpopo, as South Africa's largest potato-producing province, is well placed to benefit from closer collaboration between the agricultural sector and the university. He said the partnership would strengthen research while giving students and farmers access to knowledge and practical skills that can improve productivity across the province.

Acting Director of the Resource Mobilisation Unit at UL, Dr Bonginkosi Dladlama, said the funding supports the university's core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. "The investment will create opportunities for students, researchers and farming communities while ensuring that the university's research contributes directly to agricultural development and economic growth in Limpopo," he said.

"Farmers are at the centre of this initiative. Our goal is to empower committed farmers with the science and research they need to reach their full potential."

Chancellor engages research chairs on developing African centred research

Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma encourages researchers to strengthen African partnerships and ensure their work addresses the continent's most pressing challenges

By Reuben Maahe - reuben.maahe@ul.ac.za



University of Limpopo Chancellor Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma (middle) is accompanied by Vice-Chancellor and Principal Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, and Professor Phuti Ngoepe during a tour of the Material Modelling Centre, where she explored the cutting-edge infrastructure supporting battery materials research as part of her engagement with the university's Research Chairs.

The Chancellor of the University of Limpopo (UL), Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, has challenged the university's funded research chairs to strengthen their focus on African-centred scholarship

The Chancellor made the remarks during a visit to the university's research facilities, where she engaged with research chairs to learn more about their work, ongoing projects and future plans.

Dr Dlamini-Zuma called for stronger collaborations across Africa to ensure research delivers practical solutions to the continent's social, economic and environmental challenges.

Emphasising the university's core mandate, she said the motto, Finding Solutions for Africa, should remain the guiding principle for all research undertaken at the institution.

"Our research must respond to the needs of the continent and contribute directly to improving the lives of African people," she said.

The university currently hosts ten research chairs in fields including Agriculture, Computational Modelling, Information Systems, Mental Health, Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, the Centre for Global Change, and Liberation, Heritage and Politics.

Professor Phatu Mashela, who leads the Centre for Excellence in Climate-smart Agriculture, said the centre hosts four research chairs (a) Regenerative Agriculture, (b) Regenerative Agricultural Remedies, (c) Animal Production and (d) Agricultural Economics, Supported by the National Department of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Research Council in partnership with UL. The regenerative agriculture research chairs are focusing on soil health and plant health, the Animal and Economics on Animal health and impact assessment, respectively.

Existing partnerships in Africa include CCARDESA (Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), whereas local partnerships include various universities, departments of agriculture and the ZZ2.

Professor Kwabena Ayisi, Director of the Centre for Global Change, said the centre is using precision agriculture to help farmers adapt to climate change and changing weather patterns. He warned that future El Niño conditions could increase the risk of drought and place further pressure on South Africa's water resources.

Professor Kgothatso Shai, Chair of Liberation, Heritage and Politics, said his research seeks to preserve Limpopo's heritage while promoting a broader understanding of African history and identity. He added that the chair is committed to building partnerships, mentoring young researchers and contributing to public dialogue on contemporary social and political issues.

Professor Tebogo Mothiba, who leads the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases Research Chair, outlined initiatives aimed at improving public health through strategic partnerships and Indigenous Knowledge Systems research, while Professor Phuti Ngoepe showcased research on lithium battery materials, mineral extraction and the decarbonisation of transportation in Africa.

He said the centre has established partnerships with institutions in China and is supported by a team of more than 50 researchers.

Commending the presentations, Dr Dlamini-Zuma encouraged the Research Chairs to strengthen international partnerships while maintaining a clear African focus.

"I'm impressed by what I have seen, particularly the work on battery materials and agriculture. The quality of research being conducted here is exceptional, and through stronger international collaboration we can remain at the forefront of innovation," she said.

She concluded by expressing pride in the university's progress. "I am proud of this university. It has moved beyond the label of a historically disadvantaged institution because of the outstanding work our researchers are doing, and I will proudly share these achievements wherever I go."



University of Limpopo Chancellor Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma is joined by University management and Research Chair holders during an engagement that focused on advancing African-centred research and developing solutions to the continent's challenges.

"Our research must respond to the needs of the continent and contribute directly to improving the lives of African people."

New E-Commerce Certificate to prepare entrepreneurs for the digital marketplace

New short learning programme equips entrepreneurs and graduates with practical digital business skills to unlock opportunities in South Africa's growing online economy

By Lebogang Mathaba – lebogang.mathaba@ul.ac.za



Photos
Frans Matlala

Participants attend the launch of the University of Limpopo's Certificate in E-Commerce Short Learning Programme, which equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the digital skills needed to compete in an economy driven by online innovation and expanding digital markets.

As online shopping, digital payments and technology-driven businesses continue to reshape South Africa's economy, the University of Limpopo (UL) has launched a Certificate in E-Commerce to equip aspiring entrepreneurs, small business owners and professionals with the practical skills needed to build and manage businesses in the digital marketplace

Developed within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), the programme provides practical training in digital marketing, online business models, electronic payment systems, cybersecurity, social media marketing and the development of e-commerce platforms.

Launching the programme in the Faculty of Management and Law, the Director of the School of Economics and Management, Professor Samuel Koma, said the initiative reflects the university's commitment to producing graduates and entrepreneurs with the skills needed to respond to changing economic realities.

"The Certificate in E-Commerce should be understood within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the digital economy. South Africa continues to experience significant growth in e-commerce, and this programme is our contribution towards developing digital skills, encouraging innovation and supporting the growth of digital commerce," he said.

Head of the Department of Business Management, Kgahliso Maoto, said the certificate is designed to help entrepreneurs transition from traditional business models to online enterprises.

"We are trying to shift the paradigm from brick-and-mortar businesses to electronic businesses. As the University of Limpopo, we want to equip entrepreneurs with the knowledge and practical skills required to establish and grow businesses in the digital space," she said.



Prof Samuel Koma, Director of the School of Economics and Management, delivers the keynote address during the launch of the Certificate in E-Commerce Short Learning Programme.

Open to anyone with a National Senior Certificate (Grade 12), the two-week programme requires no previous digital experience, making it accessible to school leavers, graduates, entrepreneurs and working professionals.

During the launch, participants engaged facilitators on admission requirements, accreditation and assessment methods, while representatives from government, industry and business organisations welcomed the certificate as a timely intervention for entrepreneurs. Final-year Bachelor of Commerce in Economics student Tshagofatso Ribisi said the programme had broadened her understanding of entrepreneurship.

"It has been an insightful experience. As an emerging businesswoman, I look forward to expanding my business beyond borders. The knowledge I gained today, together with what I will learn through this programme, gives me confidence that my business will grow," she said.

Bachelor of Administration in Local Government student Reason Chauke said the programme will strengthened his entrepreneurial ambitions.



Kgahliso Maoto, Head of the Department of Business Management, encourages entrepreneurs to embrace digital business opportunities during the launch of the programme.

"The knowledge and skills I will gain through this programme will help me grow my business and create opportunities for others," he said.

The Certificate in E-Commerce forms part of UL's growing portfolio of short learning programmes that respond to industry needs while widening access to lifelong learning.



Participants engage with facilitators during the launch of the University of Limpopo's Certificate in E-Commerce Short Learning Programme.

"We are trying to shift the paradigm from brick-and-mortar businesses to electronic businesses. As the University of Limpopo, we want to equip entrepreneurs with the knowledge and practical skills required to establish and grow businesses in the digital space."

University takes eye care into classrooms

Teachers trained to identify vision problems as the University of Limpopo strengthens community eye health

By Jostinah Mamabolo – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Teachers take part in discussions during the Optometry Seminar under the National Research Foundation (NRF-KIC) project, Early Detection of Visual Inefficiencies Within a School System.

The University of Limpopo (UL) is taking proactive steps to help schools identify learners with vision problems before they begin to struggle academically

Through the expertise of its Department of Optometry, UL recently hosted an Optometry Seminar under the National Research Foundation (NRF) Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (KIC) project, "Early Detection of Visual Inefficiencies Within a School System". The seminar served as a collaborative hub, bringing together teachers, researchers and optometry students to refine early detection of vision-related learning challenges and improve access to eye care in local communities.

According to Dr Pheagane Nkoana, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Optometry at UL, the initiative was designed to equip teachers with the knowledge and observational skills needed to identify signs of possible vision problems and refer learners for professional eye examinations.

"Teachers are often the first to notice when a learner is struggling with their vision. By equipping them with the right skills, we can ensure learners receive timely care and the support they need to succeed," Dr Nkoana explained.

During the seminar, specialists highlighted a critical reality that many learners struggle academically not because they lack ability, but because undiagnosed vision problems make it difficult to read, write and concentrate in class. Teachers were trained to identify key warning signs such as frequent squinting, excessive blinking, chronic headaches, holding books too close and difficulty reading from the classroom board.

Thabisile Ramatsoma from Dr Dickson Mphahlele Primary School in Lebowaikgomo, who attended the seminar, noted that the training had fundamentally changed the way she viewed learners experiencing academic difficulties.

"I have learnt that some learners who struggle to read or concentrate may simply have vision problems. The training has equipped me to identify early warning signs and refer learners for professional eye examinations before their schoolwork is affected," she said.

The seminar also showcased ongoing research conducted at the University of Limpopo Optometry Clinic regarding common visual conditions prevalent in Limpopo communities. Participants engaged in practical training on identifying visual difficulties and learnt about eye conditions such as vernal keratoconjunctivitis and keratoconus, which commonly affects children and can interfere with learning if left untreated.

"I have learnt that some learners who struggle to read or concentrate may simply have vision problems. The training has equipped me to identify early warning signs and refer learners for professional eye examinations before their schoolwork is affected."



University of Limpopo academics, local teachers and students gather at the NRF-KIC Optometry Seminar to discuss the early detection of visual inefficiencies in schools.

UL links young farmers with industry to grow rural economies

Youth Lekgotla creates a platform where communities, researchers, government and agribusiness shape the future of agriculture together

By Nyeleti Nyathi – ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photos
Forgive Hlungwani

Panelists and participants at Youth Lekgotla 2026, where they explored ways to strengthen youth participation in agriculture.

Recognising agriculture as a key driver of the economy, the University of Limpopo (UL) is helping connect rural communities with the formal agricultural sector. It is doing this by bringing together young farmers, researchers, government officials and industry leaders to discuss opportunities and challenges facing the sector

The university's Centre for Rural Community Empowerment recently hosted the Youth Lekgotla 2026, a strategic forum dedicated to developing practical strategies to enhance youth participation in agriculture, entrepreneurship and sustainable rural development. The initiative forms part of a project funded by the National Research Foundation's Knowledge Interchange and Collaboration (NRF-KIC) programme.



Dr Patience Nkoana, Senior Lecturer of the University of Limpopo's Centre for Rural Community Empowerment, delivers the welcome address at Youth Lekgotla 2026, encouraging young people to become innovators, leaders and job creators in agriculture.

In her welcoming address, Dr Patience Nkoana, Senior Lecturer at UL's Centre for Rural Community Empowerment, emphasised the sector's critical role in sustaining rural livelihoods. She issued a compelling call, urging young participants to shift their perspective on the industry to

view the sector as a business opportunity rather than a final option.

"The future of agriculture relies on young people who are ready to innovate, lead, and create jobs," Dr Nkoana stated.



Thembi Ngotho, Training Manager at the Agricultural Research Council, shares insights on youth leadership, entrepreneurship and opportunities in the agricultural sector.

The Lekgotla provided more than just a platform for dialogue but served as a vital bridge to industry resources. Participants engaged directly with key organisations, including the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), whereby their Training Manager, Thembi Ngotho detailed various youth development programmes, entrepreneurial prospects, and research support available to aspiring farmers.

Young farmer Wendy Moshakga brought a real lived challenge that captivated delegates. Moshakga recounted her journey from unemployment to establishing a thriving farming enterprise. Beginning with only 50 chickens, her persistence let her to diversify into crop production and today, she manages an impressive 20 hectares.

The event did not shy away from the systematic challenges facing the industry. UL researchers presented studies identifying the primary obstacles that deter young people from entering agriculture, such as restricted access to land, financing, and markets. Concurrently, agricultural extension specialists underscored the critical urgent need to provide young farmers with practical skills and mentorship driven training to prepare them for the realities of the industry.

The Lekgotla concluded with a focused roundtable discussions on animal production, plant production, and agricultural economics. The session yielded recommendation for enhanced partnerships among universities, government, industry, and communities; improved access to funding and extension services; and increased youth representation in agricultural policy making.

These recommendations were formally adopted as part of the Youth Declaration on Agriculture 2026. This declaration will be presented to key stakeholders serving as a mandate to influence the design of the future agricultural policies and programmes.

"The future of agriculture relies on young people who are ready to innovate, lead, and create jobs."

Trade Fair connects young farmers to markets, opportunities

University of Limpopo hosts Youth Agricultural Trade Fair to expose students and emerging farmers to industry leaders, finance and agribusiness opportunities

By David Mmatli- Mabogo.mmatli@ul.ac.za



Highlights from the University of Limpopo Youth Agricultural Trade Fair show students, emerging farmers and industry stakeholders engaging in exhibitions, panel discussions and networking sessions aimed at promoting agribusiness opportunities, innovation and entrepreneurship during Youth Month.

To encourage youth participation in agriculture, the University of Limpopo's Technology Transfer Office (TTO) hosted a Youth Agricultural Trade Fair, bringing together students, young farmers and key players in the agricultural sector

Designed to strategically connect young people with opportunities in agriculture, the event featured a diverse programme of exhibitions, industry insights and panel discussions which focused on agribusiness development, market accessibility and agricultural finance.

The trade fair positioned UL as a vital bridge between academic knowledge and industry by creating a platform where students could engage directly with farmers, financial institutions and agricultural enterprises.

Notable participants included the UL's Limpopo Agri-Food Technology Station (LATS), which highlighted the resources available to students and entrepreneurs, including postgraduate training, to specialised food product development and food microbiology laboratory support.

Furthermore the Department of Agricultural Economics and Animal Production at UL also provided insights into the commercial viability of crocodile farming, with presenters explaining how Limpopo's warm climate creates favourable conditions for the industry.

The agribusiness leader VKB provided insights into its support for farmers through market access, processing and distribution networks, giving young farmers a practical end-to-end understanding of how agricultural products move from farms to consumers.

A dedicated panel of discussion on agriculture as a business encouraged participants to move beyond subsistence farming and view agriculture as a commercial venture. Farmers shared experiences on starting small, using available resources and building sustainable enterprises.

The second discussion highlighted the complexities of agricultural finance, with representatives from financial institutions, government and the private sector emphasising the critical requirements for securing capital. Participants were urged to maintain good financial records, separate personal and business finances, and build credible businesses capable of attracting investment.

The trade fair concluded with a rallying call for young farmers to take advantage of available support structures, cultivate professional relationships, and transform their innovative agricultural concepts into high-growth, viable business ventures.

A dedicated panel of discussion on agriculture as a business encouraged participants to move beyond subsistence farming and view agriculture as a commercial venture.

Women scholars find their voice at ULWASA welcome function

University of Limpopo strengthens support for women in research through mentorship, networking and academic development

By Malatji Monyelegwete – malatji.monyelegwete@ul.ac.za



ULWASA Chairperson Khutso Senyatsi addresses members during the association's welcoming function aimed at strengthening support for women in research and academia.



Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Limpopo, and ULW ASA Patron, reaffirms the University's commitment to advancing women in scholarship, research and academic leadership.

The University of Limpopo is actively expanding its pipeline of women researchers, implementing strategic initiatives that connect emerging scholars with established academics, creating spaces where women can grow their research careers and advance into academic leadership

"We must continue to cultivate opportunities that actively support the advancement of women in both academia and research."

This institutional commitment was highlighted during the University of Limpopo Women's Academic Solidarity Association (ULWASA) welcome function for new members. The event served as a focal point for bringing together academics, postgraduate students and professors for a day of networking, mentorship and reflection on women's journeys in higher education.

With a membership base of approximately 150 scholars, including 60 newcomers of 2026, ULWASA has become a platform where women academics support one another through writing retreats, research webinars, mentorship programmes and professional development activities.

ULWASA Chairperson Khutso Senyatsi noted that the gathering was designed to help new members feel part of a community that promotes academic growth and research excellence.

"The primary objective of this function was to foster a sense of belonging among our new members and introduce them to the vision and activities of the association," she explained.

The university's commitment to gender equity in research was reinforced by ULWASA Patron, Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, who also serves as UL's Vice-Chancellor and Principal. He emphasised the urgent necessity of increasing the representation of women at the highest levels of scholarship.

He noted that the association plays an important role in advancing women through research, teaching, postgraduate supervision and academic leadership, while simultaneously providing opportunities for networking and collaboration.

"We must continue to cultivate opportunities that actively support the advancement of women in both academia and research," Dr Mabelebele stated.

A centrepiece of the programme was a panel discussion titled Journey to Professorship, where Professors Mmapatla Senyolo (Science and Agriculture), Prof Jane Monyela (Humanities) and Dr Khomotjo Phalane (Humanities) shared personal accounts of navigating academia.

The panellists spoke openly about navigating systemic obstacles, from the transformative power of mentorship and remaining committed to long-term academic goals. Their stories offered practical lessons to early-career researchers and postgraduate students aspiring to become future professors.



Panel Discussion: Professors Khomotjo Phalane, Mmapatla Senyolo, and Jane Monyela of the University of Limpopo share insights into their journeys to professorship during the ULWASA welcoming function. Having actively participated in ULWASA initiatives throughout their academic careers, they stand as proud examples of scholars whose professional growth has been nurtured and supported by ULWASA—truly, ULWASA-made Professors.

Launching of High-Performance Sport Centre to reshape student-athlete success

New facility positions the University of Limpopo as a provincial hub for elite sport, skills development and academic excellence

By Phishego Mohubedu - ulpublications@ul.ac.za



Photo
Dimpho Boshemane

Student-athletes celebrate the official launch of the University of Limpopo High-Performance Sport Centre, saying the facility will provide the support, training and development opportunities needed to excel both academically and in their respective sporting codes.

The University of Limpopo (UL) has officially launched its High-Performance Sport Centre (HPC), an initiative designed to bolster sport development in Limpopo by offering specialised coaching, academic support, and skills development to high-achieving student-athletes

This centre aims to empower athletes to reach their full academic and sporting potential.

The HPC provides student-athletes with comprehensive access to coaching, academic guidance, and mentorship, facilitating a crucial balance between competitive sport and their studies. Beyond individual athlete development, the centre also seeks to enrich the province's broader sport landscape by creating opportunities for athletes, coaches, and other sport professionals.

Sonica Fritz, UL's Acting Director of Sport and Recreation, hailed the launch as the culmination of a long-held university vision. "This is a milestone that has been years in the making. Our athletes are like diamonds. With dedication, discipline, and the right support, their true potential can be realised."

Initially, the HPC will support 24 high-performing student-athletes through a programme that integrates elite sports training with dedicated academic development. Specialised staff will mentor these athletes, ensuring they receive the necessary support to excel in both their athletic and academic pursuits.

Complementing the sport development, the launch also introduced the High-Performance Academic Programme, offering accredited short courses in partnership with ETA College. The initial offerings, "Fitness Instructor" and "Group Exercise Instructor," are designed to equip participants with practical skills for careers in the fitness and sport industry.

UL Sport Officer, Mologade Mochechela, elaborated that these courses will cover essential areas such as exercise techniques, client safety, posture correction, and effective group exercise instruction. They are open to individuals holding a National Senior Certificate (Level 4/Matric) or higher, including athletes, coaches, teachers, sport administrators, club managers, and fitness enthusiasts.

Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele, UL Vice-Chancellor and Principal, underscored that the HPC exemplifies the university's commitment to producing graduates who excel academically and athletically. "The centre represents a strategic investment in the holistic development of our student-athletes and reinforces the university's commitment to excellence in both academics and sport," he affirmed. Melusi Nxumalo, Acting Dean of Students, congratulated the Department of Sport and Recreation on the successful launch, recognising the HPC as a vital addition to the university's student support initiatives.

"The establishment of the UL High-Performance Sport Centre is the result of a rigorous and carefully considered process aimed at elevating sport at the University of Limpopo. This achievement reflects our commitment to creating an environment where student-athletes are equipped to excel both academically and competitively."

Student-athletes have expressed considerable enthusiasm for the new centre. Lumi Mphahlele, a final-year Bachelor of Science in Life Sciences student, believes the centre will provide essential support and resources to enhance athletic performance and unlock new opportunities.

Similarly, Titus Tema, a second-year Bachelor of Arts in Languages student, is confident the HPC will help him improve his performance and advance towards his goal of becoming one of South Africa's top athletes.

"The establishment of the UL High-Performance Sport Centre is the result of a rigorous and carefully considered process aimed at elevating sport at the University of Limpopo."



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