

FEATURE ADDRESS

BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON

MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

AT THE

**GRADUATION CEREMONY OF MIC INSTITUTE OF
TECHNOLOGY'S STUDENT ENHANCEMENT AND
EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME (STEEP)**

LORD KITCHENER AUDITORIUM NATIONAL ACADEMY FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS (NAPA)

WEDNESDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2024

2:00 PM

Salutations:

- Dr. the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly – Minister of Education
- Other Cabinet Colleagues
- The Honourable Lisa Morris Julian – Minister in the Ministry of Education
- Professor Clément Imbert, ORTT – Chairman, MIC Institute of Technology
- Members of the Board of Directors, MIC Institute of Technology
- Mr. Anil Ramnarine – Chief Executive Officer, MIC Institute of Technology
- Facilitators
- Graduates
- Specially invited guests
- Members of the media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon,

It is a pleasure to deliver the feature address at this afternoon's ceremony, which recognizes you, the graduates of MIC-IT's Student Enhancement and Empowerment Programme (STEER). The Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley sends his regards. Unfortunately, he has to be in Parliament as the House of Representatives continues its work at the Standing Finance Committee to approve this year's Budget.

Today we celebrate you for completing this transformative course which serves as a career-pathing tool that provides an introduction to some of the necessary life skills required to succeed in the world of work while simultaneously showcasing the different careers and pathways available to you. The valuable skills, knowledge, and experiences acquired through this intensive 6-week course will serve as the foundation for your future careers.

Investment in Youth-Why are Youth so important?

This Government recognizes that you, our young people, are our greatest asset. You are the ones who will in the future transform Trinidad and Tobago through innovation, creativity and passion. It is the reason why the Government continues to prioritize the development and implementation of programmes that build the skills of our young people across a wide cross section of sectors.

The Government sees it as our responsibility to invest and nurture your talents and skills. We don't talk about it often enough but this investment is far reaching, from free early education, free primary level education, free secondary level education, GATE-funded tertiary education, free and sometimes GATE-funded technical and vocational training, and free apprenticeship programmes with stipends. We continue to fund and implement the right policies and programmes so you, our young persons, will be prepared for the world of work; becoming the problem-solvers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and change agents of the future.

How are we investing in our Youth?

To amplify our focus on youths, in 2020 for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government, based on the vision of the Honourable Prime Minister, created the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service (MYDNS).

Through the work of this Ministry, as a dedicated vehicle for the strategic engagement of our youths, the Government has been supporting youths via several transformative programmes including: *Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)*; *Military-led Academic Training Programme (MiLAT)*; *Military-led Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training (MYPART)*. These opportunities refine the attitude and behaviour of trainees, significantly enhancing their employability. Additionally, through initiatives such as the *Youth Apprenticeship Homestead Programme (YAHP)* and the Youth Agricultural Shade House Project, MYDNS is providing valuable skills and resources to

trainees, affording them the opportunity to pursue lucrative careers in Agriculture and Agro-processing.

In the area of industry we are also developing the skills our young people through various Apprenticeship Programmes in targeted sectors such as Manufacturing, Woodworking and Yachting. Very soon a Steelpan Tuners Apprenticeship Programme will be introduced for those of you interested in pursuing a career in manufacturing and tuning steelpan.

In addition to the above-mentioned initiatives, just recently during this year's Budget presentation, the Honourable Minister of Finance identified a number of new programmes targeting our young people. One such programme is the Online Numeracy Programme for Adults, to be delivered via the Ministry of Education's School Learning Management System. Another initiative is the National Digital Literacy Project which seeks to

bridge the digital divide in 18 rural and underserved communities to provide essential digital skills and knowledge.

Additionally, through the Ministry of Education, there will be a Digital Literacy Certification Programme for students at various levels of the education system. This initiative will enhance competency in emerging digital sectors, and promote equitable digital inclusion across varied socioeconomic strata. There will also be the rollout of an After School CSEC Mathematics Tuition Project at 26 Secondary Schools across the nation. This much needed initiative will address the declining pass rates in Math and help young persons to achieve the necessary Mathematics qualifications to further their education and improve their employability.

What do we expect?

You also have a role to play in your own development and it is your personal responsibility to make the most out of these opportunities.

I am particularly pleased to hear that some of you have already expressed interest in enrolling in the available TVET and apprenticeship programmes. It is these continued investments which will yield long term benefits and contribute to your success.

Gone are the days when education alone mattered, when searching for a job, companies are now looking to hire well-rounded employees. Employees who possess the right combination of skills, attitudes and behaviours required in the modern workplace. This is where your training in business etiquette, conversational Spanish, emotional intelligence, financial management, interview skills, entrepreneurship, technical and vocation Education training, life skills, computer literacy and resume writing, give you the competitive advantage I spoke of earlier.

Takeaways

Regardless of what career path you choose, there are some critical characteristics that will help you along the journey. The first is to **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**. Belief in self is fundamental to success. You must believe in your own abilities before anyone else can believe in you. You must trust that you have the drive, the determination and the fortitude to achieve any goal you put your mind to. This confidence will set you apart from your peers.

The second is to **FIND YOUR PURPOSE**. Your purpose will be your guiding light as you forge your path in your careers and personal lives. Write it down or put it on your phones so every so often whenever you feel a bump in the road or veer off course, or simply just need some motivation, you can go back and remind yourself.

The third is to **BE PERSISTENT AND RESILIENT**. The journey will not always be smooth, there will be highs and lows along the way but how you react will determine how far you go. Failure is part of our

overall development. It's not how many times you fall, it's how many times you get back up and go again that counts. Likewise success can bring with it, its own set of problems including complacency. However, it is important that you remain persistent. An unrelenting pursuit of your goals will guarantee your success.

The fourth is to **EMBRACE CHANGE**. In a world that is constantly evolving, the ability to adapt and embrace change is not just an asset—it's a necessity. While change can sometimes be difficult, it is constant and therefore you must learn to see change as an opportunity for growth. Reimagining how you see change will place you in a situation to not only be able to identify opportunities that arise but also be in a position to take advantage them. Becoming more open-minded allows the flexibility to embrace whatever situation presents itself.

The fifth and final characteristic I wish to highlight today is the **IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION**. Individual success often stems from

collective preparation. For instance, an athlete may win a race, but that achievement results from the countless contributions of many, including the coach, physiotherapist, personal trainer, nutritionist, masseuse, sponsors, and family. While striving for personal excellence is crucial, having a strong support network is equally vital.

Conclusion

As I close, I wish to once again congratulate all of you on a job well done. You stayed the course, embraced the challenges and acquired new skills. As you reflect on your achievements and determine what is next, remember that you have the power to shape your path forward. You are the architect of your future—build it with intention and purpose.

I thank you.