

**Speech for the Hon Minister –**  
**Launch of “Australian Alumni – Building a better future together”**  
**18 July 2018**

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

Good Morning.

I would like at the very start to thank the Australian High Commissioner for the initiative taken to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary of Mauritius through the launching of the publication ***Australian Alumni – Building a better future together***. I am particularly pleased to be here among you today, to participate in this important event.

Reflecting back on the past 50 years and our journey throughout those decades, we cannot but be proud of our achievements. When our tiny island became independent in 1968, the dynamics of international student mobility was quite slow and this for obvious and multiple reasons. From past records I was perusing some time back, the total number of Mauritian students pursuing post-secondary courses abroad in 1968 stood at about 2500. In those days, students’ mobility was primarily a South-North phenomenon and South-South flows were rather marginal if not inexistent. We are happy to note since then, that the global international student flows have significantly evolved and interesting shifts took place with regard to the main countries supplying international students, including Mauritius where the number of outbound students has been constantly increasing. The global picture with regard to the receiving countries has also undergone drastic changes. Previously those countries were mostly located in the North with the US, UK and France topping the list. We are happy here also to note that competition for international students is constantly increasing with more active recruitment policies in countries such as Australia, China and India among others. Simple economic theories indicate that where there is competition the customers stand to benefit and we are referring to our students.

According to the University World News, Australia and the United Kingdom have a far stronger share of international students than the United States, which in absolute numbers is the largest receiving country with one million international students in 2017. The number of international students in developing countries, such as China, Egypt, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa, is also increasing. According to a report issued by the Tertiary Education Commission in October 2017, the number of Mauritian students overseas stood at some 10,000 with France as the preferred destination, followed closely by Australia. I therefore encourage the Australian Alumni Association, which I understand is quite active, to carry on the great job that they have started, be it to advance the gender equality agenda or to build partnerships between Australian and African institutions. The launching of this publication is yet another addition to your achievements. We are confident that the Australian Alumni Association will help Mauritius grow further and enable our economy to progress to new heights.

Your initiative to organize a panel discussion under the Australian Alumni Speaker Series entitled “***Education and the labour market-Developing and attracting the right mix of skills***” is most befitting to our local context, where a number of policies are being put into place by the Government, including my Ministry, to bridge the gap between skills and employment. While investment in human capital is a consistent requirement for countries wishing to achieve sustainable growth, it is all the more important for a middle income country wishing to become a high income country, such as Mauritius. The key to enhancing the country’s capacity to produce highly skilled and qualified workers is education, which will, in addition, play an important role in attracting foreign investment and enhancing Mauritian competitiveness abroad.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In line with this medium and long term vision of gradually turning our island into a high income economy, my Ministry has set up the Mauritius Polytechnics Limited with the aim of training both our school leavers and our current labour force to equip them with 21st century skills. In that respect, we are seeking the possibility of collaborating with a number of renowned institutions in Australia and elsewhere and discussions are ongoing. I will not elaborate further on this aspect and I would leave it to the CEO of

Polytechnics Mauritius Ltd who will be part of the discussion panel later on and who I am sure will elaborate on the initiatives undertaken by PML to meet the industry's demand for skilled middle management technical professionals in a number of fields.

I would like here to extend a special thanks to the Australian High Commissioner who has been very active in facilitating discussions between the various institutions in Australia and those in Mauritius, including interactions between the University of Mauritius and Deakin. (To check). A number of MOU's have been signed between those institutions and in some cases the projects are already under implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our aim is also to leverage on the strategic location of Mauritius and to position our Higher Education Sector as a hub in the region. Through the Economic Development Board and our Higher Education Desk, we are constantly encouraging foreign institutions of repute to set up branch campuses in Mauritius. We are pleased that the University of Curtin has opened its fourth international campus in Mauritius in May last and the institution is now well established in the higher education landscape here and is also attracting a number of students from the African Continent and elsewhere. We are confident, Excellency, that we can rely on your support to facilitate the process and enable other renowned Australian institutions to follow suit. Our aim is to also encourage our local students to pursue their higher studies in Mauritius and thus reduce the brain drain. Our human capital is our most precious resource and we need at all cost to provide our youth with the right environment to encourage and motivate them to study here and ultimately serve the country.

In this regard, I am happy to announce that the public higher education institutions have started discussions for joint delivery of programmes of studies with Australian universities, and the plan is to have a first intake in early 2019. The aim of these collaborations is the incorporation of international and intercultural dimensions in the preparation, delivery and outcome of programmes to develop the students' international and intercultural perspectives. I believe that this mode of operation will unquestionably

attract the best students and academics from other parts of the world as well, while at the same time prepare the students to face global challenges.

As Minister of Education, I will seize this opportunity to briefly expose some of the policy dimensions that my Ministry has embarked upon. As you may be aware the Higher Education Act has been voted by the National Assembly in December last, the primary aims of which is to improve the quality of Higher Education. In that respect, my Ministry is actively working on an implementation plan and parts of the Act will be promulgated very shortly.

Our objective, Ladies and Gentlemen, is for all the Mauritian-based higher education institutions to be on a level-playing field and to progress evenly. Some major changes will also be carried out in our public higher education institutions to promote the spirit of collaborations through the implementation of some bold measures such as the rationalization and harmonization policies and a review of the funding mechanism. Resources are scarce and our aim is to assist our Public Higher Education Institutions in making judicious use of those resources and to operate in a cost effective and efficient manner without however compromising on quality.

We are also revamping our “Mauritius Higher Education Desk” to aggressively promote the Mauritian Higher Education as a prestigious destination. The proposed tagline of the Higher Education Mauritius Desk is “Higher Education in Mauritius – A Culture of Excellence”.

Ladies and gentlemen, our higher education landscape will be incomplete without appropriate investment in Research and Development. In the last Financial Year, Government budgeted an amount of Rs 20 M to boost research in our public Tertiary education institutions. Accordingly, 13 Research Schemes have been launched by the Tertiary Education Commission and 35 projects have been approved. For the current financial year an amount of Rs 40 has been earmarked and two calls for proposals will be launched. Through this initiative, we hope to improve the image of Mauritius on the

international scene and to also provide a boost to our public TEI's while concurrently help them to improve their university ranking, if not at the international level, .at least at the regional level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

As an end note, let me re-affirm my firm belief that the collaboration between Australia and Mauritius is called upon to be further strengthened and will yield much benefit to both parties—whether it is at the level of course relevance, their affordability or the potential for students' employability.

Allow me once more to thank and congratulate the organisers of this event for a magnificent initiative in the context of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country's independence and wish the Australia Alumni association good luck and success in its future endeavors.

I thank you for your kind attention.