



Minerals Education Trust Fund
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The Minerals Education Trust Fund – A good news story

At a time when good news stories are few and far between, The Minerals Education Trust stands out. Over the nearly twenty years of its existence, it has had a significant positive impact on both the minerals and the education sectors. This article outlines the work and growth of the Fund since it reconstituted the Tertiary Education Fund run by the then Chamber of Mines in 2000.

The Minerals Education Trust Fund was constituted in 2000 by South African minerals and mining companies who were concerned about the ability of the minerals education departments at South African public universities to continue to produce graduates with much-needed high-level technical skills when the ranks of skilled and experienced lecturing staff were being depleted due to attractive offers from overseas institutions, as well as from local industry. There were few, if any, incentives for qualified engineers and scientists in disciplines such as mining and metallurgical engineering, as well as the geological sciences, to enter or remain in academia when they could secure more favourable remuneration packages and career prospects elsewhere.

The Fund therefore has as its objective to subvent the salaries of key lecturing staff in the abovementioned disciplines to the point where it becomes viable for qualified professionals to not only enter the world of academia but to make it their primary career choice.

The Fund receives contributions from its members, who represent the majority of the South African mining and minerals sector and have grown from 13 companies in 2000 to 38 in 2018. Their contributions are funding subventions for 238 academic staff members at nine Higher Education Institutions (2018 figures).

It is widely acknowledged by the universities that without this funding, they would not be able to attract and retain appropriately qualified academic staff in these disciplines. Vacancy levels in the funded departments are typically

low, and when they do occur, it has been possible to make new appointments despite the scarcity of the required skills. Examples of this would be teaching skills in subjects such as mine ventilation, rock mechanics, mining geology, and extractive metallurgy to name but a few.

From time to time, the Fund has also been able to make grants for the purchase of capital items. These are normally selected to ensure that the undergraduate teaching meets the needs of the industry. An example of this would be mine design software currently used in industry being purchased with a capital grant to use in teaching undergraduate mining engineering students.

The Fund's work is carried out voluntarily by 90 individuals representing their member companies, who set aside time to visit the funded departments, build relationships, and gain the necessary insight into the status quo and needs of the departments before sitting with their colleagues on the Fund's various committees to make decisions around annual budgets and expenditure. This work has created close links between the minerals industry and the minerals education departments as well as an awareness of each other's requirements. This ensures the ongoing relevance of the teaching taking place.

The ultimate beneficiaries of this support are the 5625 undergraduate students registered in mining, metallurgical, and chemical engineering (with minerals processing) and the geological sciences in the nine funded institutions, 70% of whom are black African students and 36% of whom are female (2018 figures). We graduate more students in these disciplines than the rest of the English -speaking world. This is, however, not only a 'numbers' game – the industry also requires graduates equipped to deal with its technical and management challenges. In addressing both these requirements, the METF is key in ensuring a supply of high-level technical skills necessary for the transformation and viability of the South African minerals sector.

The Fund is extremely grateful for the contributions and participation of its members, on whom its sustainability depends.

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