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Absa and THRASS UK Press Release

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## **VARSITY COLLEGE AND ABSA LAUNCH SIXTH TALKTOGETHER SCHOOL TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LITERACY**

Today, Varsity College joins forces with Pietermaritzburg's Greenhill Primary School to expand the roll-out of the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project which aims to increase English literacy among foundation learners and their teachers in South Africa.

The TalkTogether Project is a literacy programme pioneered by Absa and THRASS UK. It uses the THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) synthetic phonics programme in order to address English literacy.

Varsity College, a division of the Independent Institute of Education, is one of South Africa's largest private tertiary institutions. It joined the TalkTogether Project in January this year. Varsity College is one of the largest private providers of Early Childhood Development student teachers in South Africa. It is also a licensed tuition provider of the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Colleen Thatcher, the National Programme Manager of the Bachelor of Education (Bed) Degree at Varsity College, said, "We are delighted with the new development, as it enables us to contribute to the delivery of enhanced education standards to teaching and learning."

Since Varsity College has a wide footprint (with seven campuses nationally), its partnership with the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Literacy Project will fast-track the implementation of the THRASS methodology; leading to increased levels of English literacy in the country.

"Starting from January, this year, 3<sup>rd</sup> year BEd students are being offered a two-day accredited THRASS training programme to prepare them adequately for teaching literacy in schools." she added.

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme helps learners develop sound literacy skills from an early stage and creates a strong foundation for English skills using the 26 letters of the alphabet and 44 phonemes (sounds), as well as graphemes to explain sounds and words.

“Absa is extremely excited about its partnership with Varsity College and we believe that their involvement will lead to faster implementation of this unique method of teaching English literacy,” said Nicholas Young, Chief Operating Officer of Absa Bank’s Unsecured Lending & New Business Cluster.

To date, over 5,000 teachers and student teachers in South Africa have earned the THRASS Accredited Certificate, of which Absa has sponsored over 1000 since the TalkTogether Project was launched in July 2007.

Launched in 2007, the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project has been rolled out to five other TalkTogether schools and their partner universities:

- Roseneath Primary School and the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg,
- Sunlands Primary School and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town,
- Eendracht Primary School and the University of Pretoria,
- George Randell Primary School and the University of Fort Hare, and
- Clairwood Boys Preparatory School and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

THRASS has also been implemented in a significant number of government schools, including farm schools in Kwena Basin, Mpumalanga, and township schools in Orange Farm and Ennerdale, and also in private schools in several provinces.

The THRASS accredited certificate is already a compulsory module for foundation phase student teachers at five South African universities: Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Cape Peninsular University of Technology, Fort Hare and KwaZulu-Natal.

“Absa and THRASS created this unique and globally pioneering model to make a difference in the core skills of literacy, the building blocks of life long learning and self development” concluded Young.

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