

Department's responds to continuing incidents of university unrest

17 February 2016 - The Department of Higher Education and Training is deeply concerned by reports of continuing student unrest at six universities across the country.

Of particular concern, is the level of violence and destruction of university property being perpetrated at these universities. The destruction of university property is an act of criminal vandalism that cannot be tolerated as this infrastructure belongs to the people of this country and represents the provision of higher education for the benefit of our young people.

Incidents of violent physical attacks and injury to students can never be justified in a democracy, which promotes tolerance, acceptance of different viewpoints and the voices of both majorities and minorities.

It has been noted with concern that in some cases, unacceptable incidents of blatant racism have occurred.

Since the Higher Education Summit held in October last year, the #FeesMustFall campaign and ongoing open deliberations between the Minister of Higher Education and Training, student leadership and vice-chancellors; the Department has taken firm action on the issues raised.

An additional R6.9 billion was injected into the university sector this year to:

- cater for the 0% fee increase;
- allowing NSFAS qualifying students to register without upfront payment;
- ensure no financial exclusions;
- support students already in the system towards graduation; and
- cater for those students with historic debt to enable them to register and complete their studies.

In addition, a Presidential Commission has been established to investigate the funding of higher education.

The Department is fully aware of the shortage of residential accommodation at many universities. In 2015, the Department gazetted policy on norms and standards on student accommodation and allocated close to R1.747 billion for student housing projects.

All of the above indicates the Department's commitment to address the issues of financially needy but deserving students and growing the provision of more and improved student accommodation.

It is therefore with deep disappointment that we are again faced with ongoing disruption to the academic year, threats, violence and injuries, arrest of students and damage to university property.

We appeal to our youth leaders to act responsibly, with maturity and tolerance in what we hope to be a combined effort to improve higher education and training in South Africa.

ENDS