



Independent

THINKING

Lifelong Learning Curves

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EXPLORING THE POST-SCHOOL TERRAIN: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Summit Statement: Transformation in Higher Education

THE second Higher Education (HE) summit on transformation last month took place at a critical time for South African public universities, which are under intense public scrutiny.

This is a watershed year for the sector, marked by deepening student and staff activism on many university campuses. Students and staff are fundamentally interrogating the nature and pace of transformation at our universities.

The summit provided an opportunity to reflect on the history of transformation over the past 21 years, with a specific focus on the past five years.

The summit was characterised by robust engagement among all university stakeholders on matters that are perceived to be vital, and opened up a space for greater understanding among them.

This space should remain open, so the robust debate can continue, and increasingly focus on actions

to advance transformation in the system.

The summit recognises the gains that have been made in achieving transformation goals in the sector.

These gains include that:

● Access to university has been significantly expanded and the overall participation targets set in

the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education are close to being achieved.

● Black students and women are now in the majority in the system;

● There has been a substantial increase in research outputs;

● The levels of funding for infrastructure development have been substantial;

● Overall, the goals of the National Plan for Higher Education have been attained in many areas, as a result of the successful steering of

the system to achieve policy goals; and,

● There have been significant increases in contributions to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

The deeper engagement about transformation goals that is now taking place is partly a result of these achievements, as we reflect on where we have been unsuccessful and what a new vision for the university system might be. *Continued on Page 2*

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THE past two weeks have highlighted some of the extreme difficulties faced by our higher education system.

Funding of the system is one of the major concerns.

As my Department has pointed out in various reports, the funding allocation to universities from the fiscus has increased by 30% between 2004/5 and 2015/16, from R9.879 billion in 2004/5 to R30.338-billion.

But the increase in financial contributions has not matched the increase in student numbers.

Between 1994 and 2014 we doubled the number of students in higher education.

This huge increase saw larger numbers of poor students entering the university system.

Today we are sitting with about a million university students, of whom about 72% are black African, 6% coloured, and 5% Indian.

More than half, 58%, are women. This puts us well on the way to achieve the target in the National Development Plan of 1.62-million enrolments by 2030.

However, fiscal constraints have pushed much of the cost of this expansion into rising student fees.

To support students from poor families to access higher education, we have dramatically increased the amount of money in the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

Allocations have increased from R578.2-million to R4.095-billion from 2004/5 to 2015/6 – a 602% increase.

Since 2009, we have increased the total number of students supported by 44.2%.

The scheme provides funding for tuition as well as accommodation and other basic costs.

From the 2012 academic year to the 2015 academic year, the average full cost of study increased by 32.4%.

The average NSFAS award increased by 48.7% in the

A dynamic world-class university and technical and vocational system is essential



period.

NSFAS provides loans upfront to poor students, interest-free for the duration of their studies, and converts a large portion of the loan to a bursary for students who successfully complete in the expected time.

Beneficiaries are expected to start paying back their loans once they are employed and earning a salary above a certain

amount (currently R30 000 per annum).

Since its inception in 1991 in the form of the Tertiary Education Fund for South Africa, NSFAS has awarded R50.5-billion to approximately 1.5-million poor students in universities and more recently Technical Vocational Education and Training colleges.

Funding from the department was R2.6-billion in the 2011/12

financial year, and will increase to R4.3-billion in the 2016/17 financial year.

We have attempted to reverse other shortfalls in terms of infrastructure.

For example, we have recently released about R1.7-billion into the system as a whole for student accommodation, the bulk targeted at historically black campuses.

Our current funding model is based on the idea that government subsidises a portion of the cost of all students, regardless of their ability to pay.

Those who can pay then make an additional contribution. Government subsidises those who cannot pay, as well as giving them additional funds to support them in the process of studying.

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