

Summit Statement: Transformation in Higher Education

Continued from page 1

The summit agreed that:

- Higher education is a public good;
- Democratic citizenship and the right to dignity critically underpin the mandate of our public universities;
- Universities have a developmental role to play in redressing inequalities in broader society;
- Curriculum change is at the core of university transformation initiatives;
- Transformation of universities is multi-dimensional and complex;
- The term transformation must continue to be interrogated and discussed at deeper levels;
- Workers are an integral part of the communities of public universities; and
- The sector is currently characterised by increasing levels of frustration at the slow pace of transformation in the university sector, with respect to the following:
 - Insufficient levels of student funding;
 - Inadequate levels of funding to match the growth in the system and concerns about sustainability;
 - Institutional environments that continue to reflect the broader inequalities in society and result in experiences of alienation by many staff and students, including persistence of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, able-ism and classism in the system.
 - University curricula and forms of knowledge production that are not sufficiently situated within African and the global South contexts, and are dominated by Western worldviews.
 - Language practices at universities that create barriers to effective teaching and learning.
 - Governance and management practices at universities that do not always effectively engage with university communities and their concerns.
 - The need for further interrogation of the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.
 - The unacceptably low

throughput rates of students, despite achievements in greater access and success.

The summit resolved that, in the immediate term:

- The sector should actively support current initiatives to urgently address student funding and debt problems, so that fee support for poor students who qualify for university can be sustained and improved;
- Institutions must build greater transparency and engagement relating to fee structures and increments;
- NSFAS must be strengthened to support improvements in student funding for the poor, and improve recovery and repayment rates;
- The mechanisms for holding institutions accountable for transformation goals should be strengthened. Transformation indicators should urgently be developed for the system to help steer transformation goals to support effective implementation of transformation imperatives;
- Decisions should be made about the role, purpose and effectiveness of Institutional Forums in facilitating transformation in the context of the analysis of current governance models for their effectiveness in supporting transformation;
- The ability of university governance and management structures to address transformation imperatives should be examined and where blockages exist they should be

addressed; and
 ● Efforts should be intensified at all levels to make university environments less alienating for many staff and students.

The summit resolved that in the medium term:

- All stakeholders in higher education, including government and the private sector, must work together to increase the funding allocated to universities in order to address the need for sustainability and current under-funding of the system;
- The work to establish more supportive and expanded student funding models must be intensified so that resources can be identified to progressively introduce free quality education for the poor. This should include investigating diversified and innovative funding systems for student support;
- The Department of Higher Education and Training should work with the sector to explore the possibility of developing regulatory frameworks in the area of fee increments, provided that this is linked to a full understanding of the cost drivers of higher education and the subsidy system;
- The role of universities must be strengthened to ensure the development of democratic citizenship to give concrete expression to the rights and responsibilities in the South African constitution and Bill of Rights, with a particular emphasis on building institutional cultures based on the right to dignity;

- Flexible curriculum pathways and improved use of data analytics are two important vehicles for addressing student success;
- Research and dialogue on curriculum transformation must be supported, and resources allocated to enable re-circulation and curriculum development processes. There should be an increasing focus on curriculum development initiatives, which examine new and alternative contents and pedagogies which relevant to the South African context;
- The sector should build on the nationally coordinated programme to enable accelerated capacity development, greater representation and improved retention of blacks and women in the academic workforce, professoriate, and university management and governance structures;
- We must ensure the successful and rapid implementation of the Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI) grant programme to address the development needs of HDI's to ensure their sustainability into the future.
- Engaged scholarship aligned to the transformation agenda must be recognised as fundamental to the mission of universities.

- Indicators to be established with respect to implementing these resolutions; and
- The relevant role-players to report annually on progress made with respect to each resolution that forms part of their scope of responsibility.

The summit reaffirmed that universities are places of debate and contestation that provide space for new knowledge to be created, intellectual activity and freedom of thought.

Debates about transformation involve fundamentally questioning the state of our universities, who is teaching and researching, what are they teaching and researching, and what the qualitative experiences of students in our universities are like.

Ultimately the summit engaged in debates about the role and nature of public universities in South Africa.

The sector must harness the new energy and ideas expressed in the HE summit to accelerate the transformation imperatives of the system.

This is the start of a new process of imagining what transformed South African universities should look like in the future.

The summit recognised the urgency of addressing the big and enduring questions of transformation it raised.

It also recognised the importance of new and different ways of engaging on university campuses so that transformation debates are characterised by dignity and a recognition of diverse perspectives.

Violence and destruction of public property, and intimidation or harassment on campuses by any group cannot and should not be tolerated.

Equally any tendency towards criminalising peaceful student protests is unacceptable as it undermines democratic processes within universities and the very notion of academic freedom.

This is a slightly edited version of the statement that emerged from the second Higher Education Transformation Summit, which Minister of Higher Education and Training Blade Nzimande convened in Durban on October 15, 16 and 17.

Debates about transformation involve fundamentally questioning the state of our universities, who is teaching and researching, what are they teaching and researching, and what the qualitative experiences of students in our universities are like.



Student leaders comprised one of the many panel discussions that the Higher Education Transformation Summit featured. PICTURE: DHET

Continued from page 1

There are different ways of paying, including greater contributions from the private sector, a wealth tax, a graduate tax, an increase in the skills levy, prescribed assets, and others.

We welcome proposals to improve the specifics of how this model operates, and an overview of some of them is explored in this supplement.

But we believe the key principles – a portion of support from the fiscus, contributions from those who can pay, and government support for those who cannot – are essential to ensure that our system is transformative.

To implement the 2007 Polokwane resolution on fee-free education for the poor, I convened a Ministerial Working Group,

which reported to me in 2013. This report has been much mentioned in the past weeks as having been suppressed by me and my department. In fact the report was circulated to stakeholders and tabled in various decision-making structures. It has not been suppressed.

Two key issues explored in this report were raising the threshold of eligibility for NSFAS support and providing full support for cost of attendance for poor students. Detailed modeling of various options were developed.

The report suggests that an additional amount of R37-billion (in 2011 rand value) is required in the baseline over the 2016/17 to

2018/19 Medium Term Expenditure Framework to cover the full cost of study loans for poor and working-class students.

We have also instituted various measures to improve administration, find additional funds, improve recoveries so that more students can be supported, and improve on policies governing the allocations of funds, as well as root out possible fraud and corruption.

We changed the interest accumulation – which used to kick in from the inception of the loan – so that it initiates only one year after graduation.

Of course in this context of limited finances, we have to closely examine whether

universities are spending their monies, including those with reserves, prudently and whether they prioritise transformative programmes.

In addition to the money required to fund poor students through financial aid, we estimate that an appropriately funded higher education sector, based on our current funding formula, in terms of international comparable benchmark funding levels, would require an additional R19.7-billion per annum in the baseline for university subsidies excluding NSFAS with an annual increment for inflation and enrolment growth to meet the National Development Plan targets.

All South Africans can agree that we need a skilled and capable population, and that a dynamic world-class university and technical and vocational system is essential to achieving this, as is a high-quality responsive community college system.

Improving financial support, and strengthening and transforming our university system is crucial, but building, expanding and improving our technical and vocational colleges as well as community colleges are equally important.

Let's all engage on how to find the resources to build all aspects of our post-school education and training system.

Dr Blade Nzimande is Minister of Higher Education and Training

We have to closely examine whether universities are spending their monies, including those with reserves, prudently and whether they prioritise transformative programmes.