



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

RESPONSE TO THE MEMORANDUM FROM PETITIONERS OR PROTESTERS FOR FREE AFROCENTRIC QUALITY EDUCATION

09 NOVEMBER 2015

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) acknowledges receipt of your memorandum which you submitted in Parliament on 29 October 2015. We believe that the response provided by the Deputy Minister on 02 November 2015 was on point and the following is to elaborate on some matters which may have not been clearly understood or adequately addressed.

0% FEE INCREASE FOR 2016

In response to no-fee increases for the 2016 academic year, the Department has immediately conducted calculations in order to determine the cost of the shortfall. The shortfall is estimated at approximately R2.3 billion. Of this amount, the Department has already committed to contribute R1,935 billion and the universities will contribute R394,7m. The Department has had to reprioritise some of its commitments in order to release this money to off-set the no-fee increases for 2016.

FREE QUALITY EDUCATION

The Department shares your concerns relating to free, quality education for the poor. It is against this background that the Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande, commissioned a Working Group in 2012 to conduct a study on the feasibility of introducing fee-free higher education for the poor and

how much it would approximately cost. The report of the Working Group is freely available in the website of the Department. The South Africa Government has already committed to the progressive realisation of free higher education for the poor, up to undergraduate level. The issue now is the financing model which should be properly designed.

The quality assurance of our higher education programmes is conducted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). We have full confidence in the organisation in ensuring that we have quality education in our higher education institutions which compares very well internationally. The Department will never support any endeavour to compromise the quality of education at our institutions.

AFROCENTRIC CURRICULUM

Your demand for Afrocentric curriculum at the universities has been heard. Academics and curriculum developers at the respective universities will be requested to bear this in mind when developing curricula. The Department will rely on all the stakeholders at our institutions of higher learning, particularly the Senates, for ensuring that curriculum transformation is indeed effected forthwith. This will require a democratic process of consultation and reaching of consensus within the institutions, as the Department cannot dictate the academic content of what institutions offer. Constitutionally our institutions of higher learning enjoy academic freedom. Moreover, the Department cannot enforce a socialist curriculum at universities as the content of what universities teach is determined at institutional level. It would be un-Constitutional for the Department to do so. The view on Socialist curriculum, as demanded by yourselves, must be expressed at the individual institutions. And we expect individual institutions and senates to engage with all stakeholders as part of the transformation curriculum development processes.

OUTSOURCING OF SERVICES

The Department notes the call of students and workers to bring about an end to outsourcing of essential services at our institutions. The Department welcomes and supports the settlements that have been reached by various institutions in changing outsourcing of services at our institutions.

The matters of labour and employment conditions are dealt with at institutional level and must be resolved between workers; recognised unions and the institution management. The Department cannot deal with labour relations issues. (Minister may wish to refer to the commitment of the ANC to reverse outsourcing and to create quality jobs. This has to be done across all government departments.)

POLICE BRUTALITY

This matter has been referred to the Acting Commissioner of Police, General KJ Phahlane. Moreover, the Department does not have the authority to withdraw criminal charges against any students, as we did not open any charges in relation thereto. Once charges have been preferred, it is the prosecuting authority that has the legal authority to deal with the matter and not a third party. We urge students to respect the law and the Constitution of the Republic when engaging in protests to avert confrontation with the Security agencies and for police to exercise restraint when engaging with peaceful protesters. We believe in your Constitutionally protected right to protest, however that must be carried out within the prescripts of the laws of our country. We also believe that the police must always act with restraint and within the confines of the law when dealing with protest actions.

MR. T.W. NXESI, MP

ACTING MINISTER

DEPARTMENT OF HIGER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

(ON BEHALF OF DR. BLADE NDZIMANDE)

ON BEHALF OF THE STUDENTS