MINISTRY
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X174, PRETORIA, 0001, Tel: +27 12 312 6339, Fax: +27 12 326 1161, 123 Francis Baard Street, PRETORIA

OPENING REMARKS BY MR BUTI MANAMELA, MP, THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING AT THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING, 2 OCTOBER 2026

Consideration of the DHET 2025/26 Annual Report

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training Mr Tebogo Letsie;
Deputy Ministers; Dr Dube-Ncube and Mr Yusuf Cassim;
Honourable Members of the Portfolio Committee;
The Auditor-General and the AGSA team;
DDG Gasa and the Departmental leadership;
Colleagues:

Thank you.
We have listened carefully to the Auditor-General and to the engagement with Honourable Members.

The message is clear. Across parts of this portfolio, weaknesses have been identified repeatedly, corrective actions have been agreed, and implementation has not followed with the consistency required. We welcome the scrutiny. We accept that the response must go beyond welcoming it.

For the public, the question is straightforward: what will change because these matters have been brought before Parliament? A student waiting for an allowance, a graduate waiting for a certificate and a community waiting for a functioning college need more than another explanation. They need institutions that fulfil their responsibilities.

That is the standard against which we must be judged.

Chairperson,

There is progress on which to build. AGSA has recognised improvement in aspects of departmental performance reporting and modest improvement in TVET college audit outcomes. Institutions maintaining clean audits show that effective administration is possible.

We acknowledge the people whose work has contributed to that progress. But improvement in one part of the system does not cancel regression elsewhere. The

wider assessment of the Department and entities shows deterioration, persistent control weaknesses and insufficient consequences.

We must be candid about that distinction. Supporting public education means protecting its resources, strengthening its institutions and insisting that they serve the public. Accountability is part of that responsibility.

The previous Budgetary Review and Recommendation Report raised concerns about vacancies, information systems, certification, performance evidence and consequence management.

Our response recorded recruitment decentralisation, the appointment of the Head of IT and measures to improve reporting and certification. These were necessary steps. But the test now is whether they addressed the problems.

An appointment does not establish that information systems are reliable. An action plan does not establish that controls are working. A process under way does not establish that an undertaking has been fulfilled. The outstanding commitments from the previous BRRR must therefore remain on our oversight agenda.

A new financial year does not erase an old responsibility.

Chairperson,

I have taken particular note of AGSA's recommendations directed to the Minister. They require stronger oversight of departmental executive management, clearer direction on reform, scrutiny of governance and appointments, protection of skills funding and greater attention to learner outcomes. I accept my responsibility to consider these recommendations and ensure that decisions follow.

Together with the Deputy Ministers, I will examine the response required, distinguish immediate corrective measures from longer-term reforms, and oversee implementation.
We will seek clarification where necessary and respect the responsibilities of accounting officers and authorities. But neither further consultation nor institutional boundaries should become an excuse for inaction on established weaknesses.

I want to assure Parliament and the public that we will maintain firm oversight over the separtment. That includes the Director-General and executive management. It includes boards, councils, administrators and chief executives. It also includes scrutiny of decisions taken by the Ministry.

Accountability cannot apply only to people below us. AGSA has made clear in this engagement that many of these weaknesses are capable of correction within a financial year. We have not heard a technical justification for allowing recommendations to remain unresolved for five years.

Corrective action must begin when weaknesses are identified, not when the next audit approaches. Where management has repeatedly been informed and agreed actions remain unimplemented, we must establish responsibility for that failure.

The question is no longer only whether an action plan exists. It is whether those responsible implemented it, whether their supervisors monitored it, and what followed

when they did not. Capacity constraints must be assessed honestly. They cannot become a standing explanation for every recurring failure.

Chairperson,

The concerns raised about CETA require particular attention. An institution under administration should demonstrate stronger governance, not a different standard of accountability.

I will require a clear account of implementation of the forensic recommendations and an evidenced response to the concerns about disciplinary processes, procurement and possible conflicts of interest. We must establish the facts, protect the integrity of the relevant processes and act on what is demonstrated. We must not prejudge individuals.

But an administrator appointed through ministerial intervention is not exempt from scrutiny. Extending an intervention does not, by itself, establish that it has succeeded. I have also heard the concerns about Northern Cape Urban TVET College.

We need an urgent, evidenced account of the work already undertaken and the further independent investigation required. Where forensic investigation is warranted, it must proceed without avoidable delay.

Learners, records and public resources must be protected while these matters are addressed. The questions about university legal expenditure and audit assurance also require examination. We will engage AGSA on strengthening oversight, including the legal and operational implications of the Committee's proposal concerning university audits. Institutional autonomy must coexist with public accountability.

Chairperson,

The discussion about NSF-funded learners raises a fundamental question about what government calls success. A learner who enrolled must be counted as enrolled. That does not mean that the learner completed, qualified or entered employment.

Withdrawals must be visible. Payments must be reconciled against actual delivery and the applicable agreements. We must understand why learners leave and what support could help them continue. After completion, we must know what happened next.

Did the person enter employment? Continue studying? Establish an enterprise? Acquire capabilities that improved their livelihood?
Where we do not know, we must say so and improve our tracking. This is why AGSA's recommendation to strengthen outcome measures matters. Public investment must be judged by the opportunities it creates for people, not only by participation recorded in a report.

That principle must shape the Skills Revolution. SETA reform must improve employer participation, grant management and learner progression. A clear transition framework must protect legitimate commitments and ongoing training, while guarding against commitments that could compromise reform or deplete resources.

The National Skills Fund must combine its developmental role with reliable project oversight and verified delivery. For colleges, reform must connect relevant

programmes with capable lecturers, modern facilities and workplace opportunities. Community education must remain part of that programme, not an afterthought.

For universities, we must safeguard access and quality while confronting financial sustainability and governance pressures. On NSFAS, sustainable financing and reliable administration must advance together. Funding policy cannot succeed if decisions, appeals, accommodation and payments fail in practice.

Across these institutions, credible information must support the entire learner journey. Buying technology is not the same as building a functioning system. We need clear ownership, secure and accurate records, and evidence that systems improve decisions and services.

As we prepare for the next academic year, this work must produce practical assurance: correct funding decisions, functioning registration systems, safe accommodation and timely allowance payments. We must identify risks early and resolve them before students carry the cost. Readiness must be demonstrated through tested arrangements, not declared through general assurances that everything will be in place.

Chairperson,

The discussion on expenditure also requires clarity. A declining register does not, by itself, prove that money was recovered or that non-compliance was prevented.

Our reporting must distinguish actual recoveries from investigations, referrals, authorised write-offs and other adjustments. Where wrongdoing is established, appropriate consequences must follow. Recovery does not replace disciplinary action or referral where warranted, and a referral does not complete the accountability process.

We must also protect those who report wrongdoing and support officials who discharge their responsibilities properly. A capable state needs both institutional support and consequences for failures to act.

I will require a consolidated response linking AGSA’s recommendations, current findings and outstanding BRRR commitments. Each significant matter must have an accountable official, a deadline, an interim safeguard where needed and evidence of completion.

The Ministry will review progress regularly. Internal audit and audit committees must test implementation rather than merely record assurances. Parliament must receive complete, timely information on what has changed and what remains outstanding.

Our responsibility is to make these arrangements work between parliamentary appearances, not only when we prepare to attend them. We welcome AGSA’s recommendations because they help us fulfil that responsibility.

We will build on progress, confront regression and examine why previous corrective actions were not implemented. The public is entitled to see the result in better institutions and more reliable services.

Ms Gasa will now lead the Department’s presentation and address the detailed matters raised.

I thank you.