



**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 STATEMENT BY BUTI MANAMELA,  
MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
TO THE JOINT SITTING OF THE PORTFOLIO  
COMMITTEES, 18 FEBRUARY 2026**

Chairpersons,

Honourable Members of the Portfolio Committees,

Deputy Ministers,

Director-Generals,

Officials,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with the Committees on the employment of foreign nationals in our post-school education and training system.

Let me state from the outset that this is a legitimate and necessary discussion. It speaks directly to the concerns of South Africans about employment, fairness, transformation, and the future of our education system. Government takes these concerns seriously, and we welcome Parliament's oversight role in ensuring accountability and coherence across the state.

At the same time, this is a matter that requires care, evidence, and balance, not slogans, not shortcuts, and not reactionary responses. We must approach it with clarity and responsibility.

South Africa's approach to internationalisation in higher education is not accidental. It is guided by a Policy Framework adopted in 2020, aligned with the National Development Plan, and grounded in our constitutional obligation to build a capable, globally connected developmental state. Internationalisation, properly managed, strengthens research, postgraduate supervision, innovation, and academic collaboration, particularly within Africa and the Global South. It supports our universities in remaining competitive, relevant, and globally engaged.

But internationalisation is not a loophole to bypass local employment. It is not a mechanism to dilute transformation. It is a strategic instrument that must operate within the law and in service of the national interest. The policy framework is clear: foreign nationals may only be employed where skills are scarce, where all legal requirements are met, and where their contribution builds rather than displaces local capacity.

Let me therefore be unequivocal: South Africans must be prioritised in employment opportunities. That principle is non-negotiable. Foreign nationals are not designated groups in terms of employment equity legislation, and their appointment must always be justified, transparent, and lawful.

It is equally important to emphasise that government is not passive on localisation. We are actively investing in the development of South African academics at scale. Through programmes such as the New Generation of Academics Programme, the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme, the University Staff Doctoral Programme, and the Future Professors Programme, government has invested over R2 billion in building the next generation of South African academics, overwhelmingly young, black, and South African. This is

deliberate, targeted localisation. It is structured, funded, and measurable. It is not rhetoric.

The evidence available to us shows that in public universities, foreign nationals constitute approximately twelve per cent of permanent academic staff. That proportion has remained relatively stable over many years, while the number of South African academics has grown significantly during the same period. There is therefore no evidence of systematic displacement of South Africans in permanent academic posts.

However, Chairperson, it would be irresponsible to ignore the real governance weaknesses that exist. There are inconsistencies in reporting, particularly in relation to temporary appointments. There are unaudited data sets. There are fragmented systems across departments that do not always align. These weaknesses create uncertainty, mistrust, and the perception and in some cases the reality of non-compliance. That is unacceptable. Where there are blind spots in data, there are risks to credibility. And where there are risks to credibility, public confidence is weakened.

This is where government must act decisively.

The core challenge before us is not institutional autonomy versus government. Nor is it internationalisation versus localisation. The real challenge is state coordination. When departments operate in silos, when data systems do not speak to one another, and when enforcement is inconsistent, the system becomes vulnerable to confusion and abuse.

That is precisely why the Departments of Higher Education and Training, Home Affairs, Employment and Labour, and International Relations and Cooperation are finalising an Intergovernmental Protocol. This protocol will align data systems, strengthen joint monitoring and inspections, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure consistent enforcement of the law. It will move us from fragmented regulation to coordinated governance.

This approach allows us to regulate firmly without undermining academic quality. It allows us to protect South African workers without collapsing our institutions into isolation. It ensures that internationalisation remains responsible and responsive to our national priorities.

Chairperson and Honourable Members, this discussion is not about choosing between being open to the world

or protecting our people. It is about doing both responsibly, lawfully, and in the national interest. Government is committed to prioritising South African employment, enforcing compliance without fear or favour, strengthening localisation through sustained investment, and managing internationalisation in a way that benefits the country as a whole.

We look forward to engaging constructively with the Committees and to strengthening oversight, coordination, and accountability across the system.

I thank you.