

MEDIA STATEMENT

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MINISTER NZIMANDE STATEMENT ON CLOSING THE GENDER GAP WITHIN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SCIENCE AND INNOVATION LANDSCAPE

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande said both the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) are implementing measures to close the gender gap within the Higher Education, Science and Innovation (HESI) landscape.

According to the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Macro Indicators Trends report (2010 to 2019), there are a number of female graduates outstripping their male students in the Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) field regardless of the high number of male students.

Minister Nzimande said this trend is also observed at PhD level where there is a narrowing of the gap for graduations.

“The HEMIS data shows that the number of female PhD graduates in public universities increased from 1 182 in 2016 to 1 540 in 2020, accounting for 42% and 43%, respectively, of the total number of PhD graduates. Consistent with the overall PhD graduation and enrolment trends, female PhD graduations in Science Engineering and Technology (SET) accounted for between 40% to 43% of the total SET PhD graduates,” said Minister Nzimande.

The Minister said it is anticipated that the overall female PhD graduations and enrolments will increase in response to the ongoing support interventions given.

Minister Nzimande said that the Post School Education and Training (PSET) Macro Indicators Trends report also observes that access to the PSET system generally favours females over males with the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for the PSET system being among the highest in the world.

“Within the university sector, female students continue to be in the majority in all major fields of study that include Business and Management, Education, and the Humanities,” emphasised the Minister.

Minister Nzimande said that the Ministerial Guidelines on Achieving Equity in the Distribution of Bursaries and Scholarships (2013), and its successor, the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy, both set an equity target of a minimum of 55% of female postgraduate students receiving support.

“The 55% female target at Honours and Masters levels was achieved soon after the policy was introduced, while there was some lag at the PhD level. Nevertheless, the target of 55% female students supported at PhD level was achieved for the first time in 2020 and for the second year running in 2021,” highlighted the Minister.

In addition to post-graduate support, the DSI, through the National Research Foundation (NRF), implements two flagship research grants programmes targeted at young and emerging researchers. These flagship programmes are the Thuthuka Programme and Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP) which support emerging researchers holding academic or research positions at South African public universities and public research institutions.

“Over the past three years (2019-2021), the Thuthuka Programme and BAAP have funded 1 849 emerging

researchers' grants for SA citizens and permanent residents, and of these 1 173 (61%) went to women. Increasing the number of black women in research and academia is critical for promoting the participation of young women in STEM fields," said the Minister.

Minister Nzimande said that in order to further ensure gender equity within the PSET sector, there are more women permanently employed in universities, although they are under-represented in decision-making and academic positions.

"There has also been a slight increase in the number of women Vice Chancellors as well as Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Several universities are already implementing their own Vice Chancellor's Academic Development Programme to complement the Department's Future Professors Programme," said Minister Nzimande.

The Department is systematically implementing programmes to advance gender equality in different facets of PSET institutions.

The University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) is aiming at the improvement of the effectiveness of currently employed staff in terms of qualifications and occupational competencies include teaching, research, community

engagement, and academic leadership and management. This is where the University Staff Doctoral Programme – (USDP) is managed.

The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) is aiming at staffing transformation and is prioritising the development of new black and women academics. Its initiatives includes the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP) which aims at recruitment and development of new staff. "Of the 104 NESP scholarships awarded, 55 are active with 33 women, and 20 of them studying towards STEM specialities," said Minister Nzimande.

The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) is aiming at achieving PhDs/Doctoral degrees and employment. "Seven-hundred and sixty (760) new posts were allocated by 2022 and out of 655 employed nGAP lecturers, 372 (56%) are female and 361 (55%) are Black females. A total of 170 females are specialising in STEM subjects for the PhD studies and teaching fields," the Minister said.

"The Existing Staff Capacity Enhancement Programme (ESCEP), a partnerships programme with international role players supports academics to acquire PhDs/Doctorates. "Through this programme, 126 (63%) women are currently

supported with 41 of them specialising in STEM subjects,” highlighted the Minister.

The Future Professors Programme (FPP) support senior lecturers in universities to enable them to apply for professorship positions. “Eighty-nine (89) emerging researchers have been enrolled and 51 (57%) is women and 16 of these women are specialising in STEM subjects,” indicated the Minister.

The Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme focusses on improving leadership and management capabilities and women participation is between 35% - 52%.

“The Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) programme is specifically geared towards capacitating women in entrepreneurship. Since 2021, 232 student women were paired with 17 professional women in the world of work, acting as mentors to students, guiding them to build resilience and understand sustainability, explore entrepreneurship as well as how to develop leadership skills,” Minister Nzimande said.

To further mainstream young women in science, Minister Nzimande said the Department of Higher Education and Training empowers women and girls through student funding to increase access and completion in PSET. “Most female

students, who constitute 61.5% of all students funded have received NSFAS funding during in 2021,” said the Minister.

Minister Nzimande said on the 17th August 2022, he presented the report on “Building the Next Cadre of Emerging Researchers in South Africa” and the recommendations of the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) study on the “Recruitment, Retention and Progression of South African Black Academics in South African Universities.

“Both these reports put a premium on accelerating the development of South African Black and women and people with disabilities in university teaching and research positions. This objective will be advanced through extensive monitoring and alignment with quotas for vulnerable groups including race, gender and people living with disabilities amongst many,” the Minister said.

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