

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE PSET READINESS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2023 AND RELATED MATTERS

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Nosiviwe Maphisa-Nqakula

Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Honourable Members

Let me thank President Cyril Ramaphosa for a comprehensive SONA address, which also placed the post school education and training sector as a catalyst towards build a better life for all.

As contained in the speech, government remains resolute in expanding the Post School Education and Training system, supported by careful and systematic enrolment planning whose objective is to increase the participation rates of our youth, especially black youth and women and ensuring optimal alignment with broader skills needs of our economy.

The challenge for my department in this coming financial year is to develop a concrete plan to significantly change the size and shape of our PSET system and address the crying need to substantially expand the college sector in line with our NDP targets. This will go a long way in expanding access to our youth, whilst at the same time relieving pressure on our universities.

Therefore, the beginning of each academic year must be seen as a further milestone in our journey of opening access to quality post-school education and training. Technological advances, as well as our contribution to innovation, require an increasingly more educated population able to effectively participate in modern society.

Registration and commencement of the 2023 academic year

Honourable members

In this current academic year, we have implemented new monitoring tools and strategies to lay the foundation for a successful academic year and overcome the traditional bottlenecks that normally affect the PSET system at this time.

We have deployed our officials across all our institutions to ascertain whether the registration processes at institutions are proceeding as planned and assist institutions, where required, with advice and guidance.

To further enable access to all our institutions, we have opened our Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) as early as the 27th January and it will close on the 31st March 2023 to assist students to access the courses and programmes of their choice in our system.

These interventions have greatly helped to reduce traditional bottlenecks in different parts of the PSET system associated with admissions, registration, student financial aid and accommodation.

We are well aware of all specific hotspots and are working closely on the ground with our institutions to resolve these underlying issues.

As of this week, 25 of our 26 universities have commenced with teaching and learning. A few are extending their registration period to ensure that we achieve as full enrolment as possible in the system. This includes making necessary arrangements to support those students who registered late.

Our TVET colleges started their academic and training programme on the 23rd January 2023. Our Community Colleges began their academic year in line with the Department of Basic Education calendar in January.

Loadshedding

We have also established a joint working group between my Departments of Higher Education and Training and Science and Innovation to develop inclusive plans and a common approach in response to challenges brought by loadshedding.

We are currently conducting a survey of the impact of loadshedding in our universities. Amongst the eighteen (18) of our institutions which responded, ten (10) developed plans, eight (8) still developing plans and other are adjusting their academic programmes in line with the loadshedding schedule. A majority of our institutions are also implementing hybrid teach and learning methods.

Student funding

In relation to student funding, we now are working towards the finalisation of a new Comprehensive Student Funding Model, which we aim to submit to Cabinet within the next two to three months. We aim through this to also introduce measures to support all the categories of students including those who are not supported by the current NSFAS funding policy.

For this current financial year, NSFAS has approved the provisional funding of a record and milestone of 1,083,055 students, a huge milestone in government's commitment to fund students from the working class and the poor! Our budget is projected to be around 47.6 billion.

As committed, all NSFAS students are registering without making any upfront payments. Unlike last year, NSFAS has this year made upfront payments to universities and colleges to ensure that they register all NSFAS students and for student allowances to be paid.

In the next week my department will be meeting with university registrars to attend to all matters relating to concerns raised by students and parents on the delays in the provision of information in order to facilitate registration by NSFAS. We will attend to all matters so as to ensure that NSFAS beneficiaries are not disadvantaged or excluded.

In order to improve the student access to their allowances, NSFAS has introduced a NSFAS Bank account to ensure that beneficiaries are paid directly and on time by eliminating third party dependencies.

NSFAS has also enabled a direct payment platform and student accommodation platform to address challenges previously experienced that had a huge impact on student well-being.

In order to manage the unregulated increasing costs for student accommodation, NSFAS has introduced a R45000 cap on student accommodation. NSFAS introduced this cap to manage profiteering and price collusion by private providers.

Currently there is a challenge of private and institutional accommodation above the cap of R45000. NSFAS is working with the affected institutions and is fast tracking the accreditation in the affected areas.

Maintaining health, wellness and security for all

Honourable members

We must recognize that our Post School Education and Training (PSET) sector is a microcosm of our greater society. This is clearly demonstrated in the manifestation and in many instances of reproduction of social pathologies on our campuses such as rape, violence against women and mental illness.

This is the reason that we are amongst the leading Department to introduce the DHET Policy Framework on fighting Gender Based Violence (GBV), including guidelines, protocols and infrastructure on how to respond to this pandemic.

This year, I will be convening a national Summit and dialogue with our Men Leaders in the PSET system to address the issues of gender inequality, women's emancipation, toxic masculinity, patriarchy through the UNESCO-inspired "Transforming MENTalities Initiative,". Through this initiative we will find ways to build our next generation of young men and boys to actively champion gender equality and women's emancipation.

The battle for gender equality and women's emancipation, including the fight against GBVF will not be won unless boys and men are mobilised behind these efforts!

Our PSET system must lay a foundation for a transition from learning to working

Honourable members

In keeping with President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa's 2022 State of the Nation (SoNA) and in support of the ERRP, our skills development system have increase learners placed in Work-based Learning programmes from 78 317 in 2020/21 to 107 000 in 2022/23.

By December 2022, we have secured 10,616 placements for our TVET students with employers in the public sector, private sector, and non-governmental organisations with support of our SETAs.

Our SETAs combined, placed 44 619 unemployed into learnerships, of which over 34 710 were young people below the ages of 35 years old and over 25, 550 were females at the cost of about R 1 billion.

Expanding access to PSET

TVET college infrastructure

As pointed out earlier, each academic year must be approached as a milestone in taking forward our goals to improve access and success in our PSET system. Our department has invested over R2.880 billion in the development and refurbishment of 16 new TVET Campuses that will enable expansion of the TVET system over the medium term.

In this regard, we have completed 10 campuses (Thabazimbi, Umzimkhulu, Graaf-Reinet, Nongoma Msinga, Aliwal North, Kwagqikazi, Ngqungqushe, Nkandla A and Bhambanani) is completed and operational, and of which 3 new campuses (Greytown, Sterkspruit and Balfour) will be completed during 2023.

The remaining three (3) sites will also be completed by the end of the 2023/24 financial year with enrolments planned for 2024/25.

University Infrastructure

In the MTEF period 2022/23 to 2023/24, we have invested R7.584 billion in infrastructure projects across the 26 universities.

R2.953 billion of this investment will be dedicated towards student housing for the delivery of 16 858 beds across 11 universities. This will ensure that we have additional 15 898 new beds and that we refurbish 960 beds.

Working together with the Tshwane University of Technology as project manager, we have now begun the process to establish a university campus in Giyani Limpopo.

We have made progress in our plans to expand and relocate the University of Zululand teacher training faculty to the former KwaZulu bantustan legislature Precinct at Ulundi.

We have also completed the construction of the Sekhukhune Skills Development Centre to the value of R146.9 million, through our Wholesale and Retail SETA, in collaboration with the Sekhukhune TVET college.

Honourable members

We now have expanded our Centres of Specialisation to thirty-four (34) Centres in twenty (20) of our TVET Colleges with a further investment of R68 million. Sixteen (16) of our TVET Colleges now have thirty-five (35) Trade Test Centres. Under apartheid there was only one trade test centre nationally, 'Olifantsfontein', now known as Indlela.

We have also entered into a number of other partnerships with the private sector to provide training and to give workplace exposure to both our TVET college lecturers and students.

We have also established entrepreneurship hubs at TVET Colleges to support students to move into self-employment after completion of their programmes.

Community Colleges

We have also made available R200 million to our Community Colleges through the National Skills Fund for the implementation of skills, occupational and non-formal programmes which started in 2023.

This includes the provision of Civic Education Programme which will teach the importance of protecting and supporting South Africa's democracy, confronting racism and patriarchy, and

fostering better understanding of citizens roles and responsibilities.

We therefore call upon all our students to grab these opportunities with both hands and focus on their studies and make 2023 a successful academic year for themselves and our country.

In conclusion, we urge our institutions to engage with students and trade unions in order to minimize chances of violent protests. Whilst protests are legitimate there must be no destruction of property and/or threat to life and limb.

I thank you