



**MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR
BLADE NZIMANDE STATEMENT ON PROGRESS IN THE POST
SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR IN RESPONSE TO
COVID-19 EPIDEMIC - LOCKDOWN LEVEL ONE AND TOWARDS THE
END OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2020**

26 November 2020

Programme Director,
Deputy Minister Buti Manamela;
DHET Exco;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen

Good day,

COVID-19 left no sector in our country and the world unaffected, and its consequences will be felt for years to come.

This pandemic, which created a “new normal” for the entire country, had a huge impact on the PSET sector, affected the 2020 academic year and

demanded that we adopt new ways of offering learning and teaching, and all the other mandates of the PSET system.

I remain grateful by the commitment of all members of the Ministerial Task Team on COVID 19 who contributed significantly to us saving the academic year and saving lives.

I therefore would like to salute our Deputy Minister Buti Manamela, as well as our key stakeholders such as SACPO, USAF, Labour Unions, SAUS, SAFETSA, student political organisations, public servants and all the public and private institutions who made a contribution to us saving the academic year and saving lives.

Equally I want to acknowledge the leadership role of President Ramaphosa, my cabinet colleagues and the National Command Council (NCC) who guided the entire Covid-19 response process.

At all material times, our measures continue to be guided by the strategic logic of the national COVID-19 risk adjusted strategy, and we committed ourselves to ensuring that no student is left behind and that all our PSET institutions are safe.

ON HIGHER HEALTH MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19

HIGHER HEALTH, as the health and wellness implementing agency of the Department of Higher Education and Training, has been supporting the COVID-19 response across the Post School Education and Training System (PSET) since Lockdown Level 5, and up till now.

Working with other experts, scientists and stakeholders, especially the World Health Organisation (WHO), the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), our sister Department of Health, and other agencies, HIGHER HEALTH built comprehensive programmes, systems, controls and infrastructure. This has been done through the establishment of guidelines, protocols and capacity building that are grounded in science and the latest epidemiological data.

The inevitable reality of the COVID pandemic and its associated mortality continues to loom around the sector, warranting continuous strengthening of systems, controls, and management of the pandemic, in the sector.

Let me, now engage on the recent few **cluster outbreaks** that we have been experiencing over the last few weeks in several institutions in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

To address these COVID-19 outbreaks, HIGHER HEALTH along with our leadership from institutions, have assembled a **multidisciplinary investigation team** which also includes members from World Health Organization, the Health Department, the National Health Laboratory

Service (NHLS) to manage and contain the outbreaks through early identification of infected students and staff, identifying their contacts and appropriately assisting them with early isolation and quarantine to break the chain and further spread of the infection.

Furthermore, we successfully negotiated with the NHLS to reduce the confirmation time for results. In the past few weeks since the outbreak over **600 students and staff** have been tested and those who tested positive have been isolated or admitted to quarantine and health facilities. Contacts have also been isolated and given the necessary support.

The Cluster Investigation teams have responded to the outbreaks in an exemplary manner and this has resulted in having few to no new cases in the last week.

However, we do anticipate more cluster outbreaks, across other provinces and institutions and I appeal to students and staff to stick to preventive measures – including wearing of masks, proper hand-washing, avoiding handshaking and social and physical distancing.

I once again call upon every student to use this **TOLL-FREE line 0800 363636**, anytime during the day or night and they must know that they are not alone, in these challenging times.

Gender-Based Violence

In response to President Ramaphosa's call for civic activism in dealing with gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), I released the Policy Framework to Address Gender-Based Violence in the Post-School Education and Training System (2020).

This policy is a response to continued GBV in colleges and universities, leading to violent incidents, depression on the part of victims, their families and friends, and loss of lives.

In 2019, I also appointed a Ministerial Task Team to advise me on matters of sexual harassment and gender-based violence and harm at our institutions.

The Task Team recently held four virtual engagements with stakeholders within the university sector. The input of these workshops will provide a valuable basis for finalising the work of the MTT. I therefore expect the report by end of the current financial year.

Equally important, as we are now in the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence against women, children, and people with disabilities, my Department, in conjunction with HIGHER HEALTH and other stakeholders, will be rolling out gender-based awareness campaigns throughout our institutions and communities. The detailed plans will be communicated in due course.

As the intellectual resource for our country, we also call upon our PSET sector to contribute further in the fight against GBV by undertaking research and other studies to better inform our country's strategies in dealing with this pandemic.

ON THE NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME (NSFAS)

On the Laptop Project

Following the previous tender that had to be cancelled due to all bidders not meeting the requirements, the new laptop tender was advertised on 4 September 2020 with the closing date being 21 September 2020.

By the closing date of the tender, 21 September 2020, a total of **140** bid proposals were received.

All 140 bid proposals were evaluated by the NSFAS bid evaluation and adjudication committees, between 22 September 2020 and 13 October 2020.

I am happy to announce that the NSFAS Administrator subsequently approved the tender award on 2 November 2020 to 5 bidders, which will work with NSFAS and our institutions in the delivery of laptops to our students.

NSFAS has communicated the award to the successful service providers on 2 November 2020.

NSFAS is in the process of completing the contractual arrangements with all successful service providers, following which the details of the final mutually agreed guidelines will be communicated with all institutions.

This will then lead to institutions commencing with the procurement of laptops required by the NSFAS funded students.

NSFAS has published the award details, together with the list of unsuccessful bidders on the National Treasury E-tender portal and the NSFAS website.

The publication of the tender award was published in the Government Tender Bulletin on the 13th November 2020.

I therefore would like to thank NSFAS for finalising this process and to congratulate all the companies who were appointed. But given that the procurement process has been concluded much later than originally planned, the laptops will now be distributed in the new academic year, which will now also assist us to deal with severe financial challenges faced by NSFAS, as will be explained below.

The delay in providing these laptops is regrettable and I want to assure the students that it was not intended but it was very important to ensure that the procurement processes were followed strictly.

I also wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Dr Randall Carolissen, the Administrator of NSFAS for having done a great job in turning

organisation around over this past two and a half years, as his tenure comes to an end in December 2020. Despite many challenges, NSFAS is a much better entity now than it was when you took over.

On N+2 Rule Appeals

In June 2020 after having been updated with requests and objections from students regarding the N+ rule, which is the funding policy of NSFAS, a preliminary investigation conducted by NSFAS showed that there were potentially **29 000 students** who were affected by the N+ rule.

The investigation revealed that the majority of these students exceeded their N+ rule due to medical reasons, while some have exceeded but because they are currently in their final year of study, they had to be accommodated.

A total of **9 541** N+2 review appeals were received with **8 761** review appeals approved and **780** rejected for various legitimate reasons.

I therefore urge all our institutions to urgently communicate the appeal decisions to all affected students. NSFAS must also ensure continuous follow up with all our institutions to ensure that students are always notified on the outcome of their appeals.

On 2021 NSFAS Application Cycle

To date, NSFAS has received a total of 650 000 applications for 2021 of which over 69% applications are from females, with males accounting for 31%.

Concurrently we have receiving a high volume of applications from SASSA beneficiaries amounting to 330 000 as a result of our MOU with the Department of Social Development. KwaZulu Natal (KZN) continues to dominate with the highest number of applications as compared to other provinces, to date accounting for 157 252 (27%) applications, followed by Gauteng with 119 410 (20%) and Limpopo with 95 091 (16%). Applications from Western Cape and North Cape remains below expectations.

We expect this number to increase quite substantially as past experience has shown that it is in the last two weeks of the application cycle when some students tend to apply in greater numbers. Rough estimates suggest that there will be over 800 000 new applications for the 2021 application cycle by the closing date at end of November 2020.

However, we remain deeply concerned at the slow and low rate of applications from students with disabilities and I would like to urge them to use this opportunity and apply for a fully comprehensive bursary funding for 2021.

As the closing date is looming NSFAS has embarked on an intensified outreach programme visiting communities across the country to assist applicants who have not yet applied for funding.

I would like to thank the Department of Basic Education and the National Youth Developing Agency (NYDA) for availing their Centres to be used as NSFAS applications centres. These centres will remain fully functional until the closing date of the 2021 application circle which is the 30th November 2020.

ON UNIVERSITIES

Saving the academic year and the extended academic year

The COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown caused serious disruption to all facets of university operations, including their teaching and learning, and research and engagement programmes.

Universities and their staff and students responded positively, although at different paces, depending on each institutional circumstance.

We have been closely monitoring the situation across all universities, and I am pleased to say that as of 13 November the vast majority of institutions (25) are at “low risk” of not completing the academic year.

I want to assure South Africans that all our universities are fully committed to complete the 2020 academic year by mid-March 2021. Twenty five (25)

universities are set to start the 2021 academic year at end of March 2021 and one university in April. This aligns well with the release of the Basic Education National Senior Certificate results, which are expected to be released on the 23rd February 2021.

Despite the crisis that COVID-19 caused, valuable lessons have been learnt. We have again been starkly reminded of the high levels of inequality that prevail in South Africa generally, as well as in higher education.

Better to relatively better developed universities have generally been able to navigate the severe operating challenges with less difficulty than under-developed, often historically-black universities. We have sought to structure the COVID-19 support interventions in the sector to provide aggressive support for especially the historically disadvantaged institutions.

It is illuminating to note that a number of universities are pointing to better student performance in comparison to previous years. We have interrogated the reasons for this performance and found multiple contributory factors. Although more careful assessment across all teaching and learning parameters must still be done, especially after the completion of the 2020 Academic year, initial research indicates positive impact in many cases in respect of **(i) the multimodal, blended approach to teaching and learning, (ii) opportunities provided to students to learn in different ways, more flexibly and at their own pace, and (iii) multiple assessment methods.**

It is clear that blended and multimodal learning, including digital and online learning must become a standard part for the future higher education system. In this regard I intend next year to set up a Ministerial Task Team to help us develop strategies to make online learning a reality in our sector.

However, we must also immediately point out that a significant number of students, especially those at historically-black universities and campuses, and those living in working class and poor communities, have struggled to access digital platforms because of lack of devices, connectivity and other family household circumstances. It is clear that the class and spatial legacies of the past are continuing to impair the ability of many our students to fully take advantage of learning opportunities under the COVID-19 threat.

However, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for very important initial work it has undertaken to track student accessibility to connectivity in their homes.

Tuition and accommodation fees

I would like to remind everyone that on the 5th October 2020, I released Directions in the Government Gazette to provide a framework for tuition and accommodation fees in the university sector for the 2020 academic year.

Students who are staying in university owned, managed or leased accommodation will not have to pay any additional accommodation fees as indicated in the Gazette.

However, I am aware that there may be additional costs for some students in respect of private accommodation allowances.

In this regard, we urge all private accommodation providers to work within this national framework as provided within this Government Gazette and I request that, wherever possible, universities assist students in negotiating with private providers on this matter.

I urge that we all work together to find the best possible solution of supporting our students to effectively complete the academic year, within the budgetary constraints we face as a country and within our sector.

Institutions are busy considering the issue of residential free rebates following the non-occupation of some residences by students over a period of time. Universities will directly engage affected students in this regard.

On another related but equally important matter, we have also been working towards a policy framework on the regulation of university fees. However, this process was not completed for the 2021 academic year due to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have therefore proposed a further fee compact to public universities, continuing what has been in place for the past few years. The intention of these fee compacts is to ensure fee increases are kept at affordable levels, while also ensuring that universities are able to remain sustainable.

I have written to all university Councils with a proposal for a CPI-linked fee increase for 2021. This would be **4.7%** on tuition fees and **6.7%** on accommodation fees, in line with previous years. I am awaiting the response of university councils on this matter.

In relation to the modelling of possible costs for the extended academic year 2020, in respect of NSFAS-funded students, we now have determined the financial implications relating to the extension because we have further information about the academic calendars of the universities.

We now know that two universities (**UJ and UP**) plan to complete the 2020 academic year during this month of November 2020; eight (8) universities (**CPUT, SPU, SU, UCT, UFS, UNISA, UWC and WITS**) plan to complete in December 2020; three (3) universities (**NWU, RU and UMP**) in January 2021; nine (9) universities (**CUT, DUT, MUT, NMU, UKZN, UL, UNIVEN, UNIZULU and VUT**) in February 2021, and four (4) universities (**SMU, TUT, UFH, and WSU**) in March 2021.

It should be however noted that, given the difficult fiscal situation in our country, no additional funding was provided to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to support the payment of additional extended year allowances.

We therefore requested NSFAS to identify funds to support the extended academic year. This was done within the existing allocations to the entity, and taking note of the crucial fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of university students qualifying for NSFAS funding in 2020.

NSFAS therefore identified some funding to support the extended academic year, and I am pleased to indicate that additional **living allowances to cover meals and personal expenses** will be made available for those qualifying university students who require additional months to complete their academic year.

I wish to stress that this is not a blanket support – where students have completed their academic year they will need to wait until the 2021 academic year for their new allocations.

NSFAS will work closely with universities to identify the students affected and the extended time for each student that requires support. Universities will have to provide this necessary information to NSFAS to enable the allowances to be expeditiously processed.

ON TVET COLLEGES

Beginning of the academic year 2021

The start of the 2021 academic year for TVET colleges will delay by three (3) weeks than normal, with returning students reporting to campuses on the 25th January 2021.

The situation is as a result of having the 2020 examinations continuing into until the 11th of December 2020 with the colleges closing on the 15th December 2020. The marking, moderation and results processing will thus

go into January 2021 affecting the usual release of the results. However, I must indicate that this arrangement is carefully considered and will not affect the 2021 academic year.

Enrolment for the Grade 12 learners in 2021

The Department had engagements with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and South African College Principals Organisation (SACPO) regarding the implication of the late release of the Grade 12 class of 2020 on registration for the 2021 academic year.

Following these engagements, it was concluded that the release of matric results in February 2021 does not necessitate an amendment of the 2021 academic calendar for TVET colleges as this will only affect students who would like to enrol for the Report 191 programme.

ON COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Beginning of the academic year 2021

We have provided the CET Colleges with an enrolment plan and the 2021 academic calendar, which is aligned to that of the mainstream public-school system, to ensure accessibility as the majority of Community Learning Centres are hosted at public schools.

As with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) calendar, there will be a slight delay in the start of the academic year. However the College staff will return earlier to ensure a smooth start of the academic year.

Tuition is scheduled to start on the 27th January 2021. The Department will conduct monitoring and support visits at the commencement of the academic year to assess the state of readiness and functionality of centres, their needs and compliance with COVID 19 regulations and protocols.

ON SKILLS DEVELOPMENT BRANCH

I am pleased to report that there is also a positive indication that our skills development activities will resume, including artisanal activities such as trade testing.

For the financial year ending 31 March 2021, we have observed decreased estimates for the skills levy collections from **R19.413 billion** to **R11.291 billion**, a reduction of **R8.122 billion (42%)** - as part of Covid-19 Tax Relief Measures, as announced by the President on 21 April 2020.

The implication of this revenue decline resulted in us revising down our targets for the current financial year, especially regarding the workplace-based learning opportunities, such as learnerships and apprenticeships, which are important in keeping young people engaged in some form of socio-economic activities.

We will be reviewing our SETA Grant Regulations so that we reflect the contemporary challenges and opportunities especially as ushered by the Economic Restructuring and Recovery Plan.

ON INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR

While significant investments have been made in the provision of infrastructure in the Post-School Education and Training Sector, it is our considered view that the fragmentations that have been there over the years in relation to infrastructure support for universities, TVET and CET colleges were not desirable.

I therefore have tasked the Planning Branch in my department to coordinate infrastructure provision throughout the PSET sector, including the Student Housing Infrastructure Programme that we have been managing with the DBSA.

ON THE 2020 NATIONAL LIST OF OCCUPATIONS IN HIGH DEMAND

Today, I am launching the latest National List of Occupations in High Demand (OIHD) in South Africa. The list reflects the work undertaken by the DHET, through the Labour Market Intelligence research programme, to support human resource development in the country.

This list is updated every two years, and marks an important step towards helping us understand better the needs of the labour market and signals

opportunities where our students and graduates are likely to stand a better chance of finding employment.

This list is based on a thorough review of international good practice and information about global occupations in high demand. In addition to the use of a range of statistics for the compilation of this list, we had broad as well as deep stakeholder engagements regarding which occupations are in high demand.

I would really like to thank all the organisations, both public and private, our social partners, and our researchers for supporting the DHET to produce a credible, evidence-based and well-validated list of occupations in high demand.

This list tells us which occupations are likely to have such vacancies and which occupations are likely to grow due to new investments, especially by government.

The list identified that **345** occupations that are in high demand out of a total of **1 500** registered in our Organising Framework for Occupations. These occupations are at both high as well as intermediate skills levels.

Many of the occupations on the list can be associated with key areas and sectors identified as crucial for the Reconstruction and Recovery Plan such as the ***digital economy, energy, infrastructure development, manufacturing, tourism and agriculture, data scientists, web developer, computer network technician, electrical engineer,***

concentrated solar power process controller, mechatronic technician, toolmaker, gaming worker, crop produce analyst, agricultural scientist, just to name a few.

In launching the 2020 National List of Occupations in High Demand, I call upon our universities, our TVET Colleges and private education and training institutions as well as other training providers to use this list to inform their selection of programme offerings, their resource allocations and enrolment planning processes as well as the identification and development of new qualifications and programmes that are more responsive to the needs of the economy and society as a whole.

I am also hoping that those of you involved in the provision of career development and information services will use this list to guide young people about possible career opportunities.

The list is only one of several elements in our skills planning arsenal. As a Department we have also researched and identified those occupations that may require skilled personnel to be recruited from outside of South Africa.

This list will be shared with the Minister of Home Affairs, who will consider it for possible adoption and gazetting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Appointment of the New NSFAS Board and CEO

I have appointed a thirteen (13) ordinary members of the NSFAS Board in accordance with the criteria prescribed in the NSFAS Act for a period of four (4) years.

The board members are:

- Ernest Khosa (Chairperson)
- Mr Yonke Twani
- Mr Bamanye Matiwane
- Ms Jullie Beya
- Mr Cyril Madiba
- Ms Reshma Mathura
- Mr Max Fuzani
- Mr Richard Msweli
- Ms Pumela Msweli
- Mr Sanele Zondi
- Ms Lindiwe Matlali
- Ms Pretty Makukule (DHET Rep)
- Treasury Rep (to be appointed)

I will be requesting the Board to co-opt two more members because as it stands the Board is not fully balanced. There is a need to bring individuals with actuarial and social dialogue skills and experience. They will be announced later whilst I completed engagements with the Board.

After an extensive search, I concurred with the decision of NSFAS to appointed Mr Andile Nongogo as the Chief Executive Officer of NSFAS for a period of five (5yrs).

Appointment of members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Infrastructure (MACI).

Allow me to share the list of the appointed members of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Infrastructure (MACI); who will provide technical support to me, as we navigate through this very critical programme.

The members are:

Mr Bafana Ndendwa

Mr Madapu Nhlapo

Mr Warwick McCance-Prince

Ms Lebo Leshabane, and

Ms Nonkululeko Ntshona.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate all those who have been appointed in various position in our sector. I wish you all the best in your responsibilities.

In conclusion, COVID-19 is here to stay for the foreseeable future. It is not seasonal. This means that we must all stay alert to the changing landscape and keep on planning for months and possible years ahead. Let me take this opportunity to wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Thank you