

Media Statement by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr BE Nzimande, MP, on the Higher Education Summit, 15 – 17 September, 2015

Good day.

I am very pleased to announce today the convening of the Higher Education Summit to be held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli ICC in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, from the 15th to the 17th of October 2015.

The aim of this Summit is to bring together key stakeholders in for a critical dialogue on the higher education system. This follows from the 2010 Higher Education Summit that took place at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Since then there have been many changes in institutions and in the system as a whole that we should reflect on and exchange views about. We also need to take stock of the current situation and share ideas on what goals we should set ourselves for the future.

The Summit will be attended by a wide range of higher education stakeholders. University representation will include representatives from the governance and management structures, as well as a significant student and staff component. Relevant government departments, statutory and non-statutory organizations, civil society organizations, research organizations and unions will also be invited to participate. I need all of these voices to have sufficient opportunity to engage on the solutions to the accelerated transformation of higher education.

The Summit will provide the opportunity for the sector to review progress that has been made regarding transformation imperatives that were identified at the previous summit, in the National development Plan and in the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training.

It will also create space and opportunities for a range of voices to be heard, and perspectives to be debated. It will move beyond a perspective of transformation that focuses largely on unequal demographic representation in the sector, important as this is, to a deeper interrogation of the range of issues that underlie inequality, and to a focus on the issues that impact on quality in the sector.

Importantly, the Summit will provide the space for re-imagining higher education transformation, tackling the difficult issues that are currently explosive on our campuses, and building a vision for what a South African university should look like today and in the future. It will require delegates to reflect on questions such as:

1. What would a transformed higher education sector look like?

2. Where are we as a sector with regard to transformation? What have been the gains, and what are the pressing issues that must urgently be addressed?
3. What actions need to be implemented in order to address the issues?
4. How do we determine whether the sector is making progress in addressing these issues?

Engagements will focus on transformation with respect to areas and issues such as curriculum, institutional environments, access and success, including transitions into and through higher education; research and engagement and leadership, management and governance, and matters relating to funding and financing of higher education in our country. Discussion documents will provide more details in these areas.

I have insisted that whilst the summit will allow for the opportunity to identify areas where progress in transforming the sector has been made, it must be bold in identifying blockages to radical transformation. It must resolve on concrete actions that must be put in place to advance an accelerated pace on transformation where progress has been slow, and also identify clear indicators against which progress can be made. Such actions and indicators will inform the work of the Transformation Unit, institutional plans and monitoring, and the development of the national plan for post-school education and training.

The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training adopted by Cabinet in November 2013, provides a strategic framework for all policies and plans of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and identifies major priorities. It lays out a vision for fundamentally restructuring and transforming the South African post-school system of education and training. On the basis of the White Paper, my department has embarked on a process to develop a comprehensive and integrated national plan for post-school education and training and the Summit can assist that process.

The university sector is a crucial component of the post-school system. While this Summit will focus primarily on the role and functioning of the universities, it should always keep in mind the post school system and the universities' role within it.

This Summit, as stated in its theme, is therefore about 'transforming higher education for a transformed South Africa'. Thus, the role of the universities must be considered on the basis of the education system as a whole and of wider society.

As we reflect on the state of higher education transformation, it's worthwhile to consider where we have come from, and take stock of our achievements as well as our shortcomings. We should also consider how the environment has changed and to what extent this has required us to rethink our goals and strategies. We also aim

to provide information on some of the key developments and issues in higher education over the last five years since 2010, and discuss some pertinent questions at the Summit.

The 2010 Higher Education Summit

The Higher Education Summit in 2010 was a wide-ranging discussion on higher education issues and in particular the issue of transformation in its broadest sense. The 2010 Summit adopted a Declaration that set out the main challenges as understood by the participants.

Concrete steps have been taken to achieve most of these – for example:

1. The historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) are being prioritised for infrastructure spending;
2. The expansion of post-graduate studies and research are getting attention as is shown by the increasing enrolments, programmes to expand research outputs and post-graduate studies further are being put in place;
3. The DHET has recently adopted a new policy for the revitalisation of the academic profession; a number of programmes have been developed to improve opportunities for young African academics, particularly women;
4. Most universities continue to make progress towards developing curriculum in a socially relevant direction;
5. Some universities have made progress in affirming the African languages and African language departments. However, we realise that the progress has been uneven and must still be taken further.

Further, since the last Higher Education Summit, the DHET has undertaken a wide range of other initiatives. Some of the most important include major reviews and increase of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); of the provision and conditions of student housing; and of university funding. These also include a draft policy framework for university differentiation that was released for public comment and those comments are currently being analysed. The Department has developed the *Staffing South African Universities Framework* (SSAUF) to ensure that in the future the number and quality of academics is suitable and that the academic profession becomes more representative in terms of race and gender. We will also discuss the shortcomings encountered in so far as the areas of the 2010 Summit that have been inadequately addressed at this stage, and how they can be advanced further.

Issues to come under the spotlight at the 2015 Summit include, but are not exclusive to:

1. Changes in the size and demographic diversity of the university sector.
2. Transformation of the Higher Education and Training sphere of learning.
3. Building an integrated post-school system.
4. Improving student success.
5. Student housing and accommodation.
6. Research and innovation.
7. Staffing the Universities.
8. Student funding.
9. Curriculum and learning issues.

Topics such as community engagement and internationalisation will also be open to discussion.

I therefore wish to take this opportunity to invite all interested persons and stakeholders to seize this opportunity and come together and participate in our effort to shape the future of our higher education and training landscape in order to chart a way forward in order to bring about meaningful transformation in line with the economic and other societal demands of our country in the 21st century onwards.

However, I am deeply concerned that this Summit takes place against incidents of violence in some of our universities. We urge all stakeholders to openly engage with each other on all matters that require attention at institutional level, and for management to take a lead in this regard. But at the same time I strongly condemn acts of violence and vandalism that accompany some of the student protests. There is no justification whatsoever for such actions in a democratic South Africa. I therefore urge institutional management to work closely with law enforcement agencies to bring culprits to book.

I am also hopeful that whilst the Summit is not the forum to deal with specific institutional challenges, it however must be used as an important platform to, as outlined above, deal with system matters in a manner that will help to resolve whatever problems at institutional level.

Thank you.

Dr BE Nzimande, MP
Minister of Higher Education and Training