

Statement by Higher Education and Training Minister Dr Blade Nzimande on post-school options for the Class of 2009, 13 January 2010

The next few months will see progress towards many of the goals we have set for the Department of Higher Education and Training. We have in the past seven months been shaping this new department, bringing the skills component of the Department of Labour, and the Universities and College components from the Department of Education into the single Department of Higher Education and Training. We are ready to execute our core mandate and develop a coherent and differentiated post-school education and training system.

Some Immediate Priorities of the Department of Higher Education and Training

In 2010 we will be supporting the Deputy President in the establishment in the HRD-SA Council, strengthening the National Skills Authority and paying particular attention to issues such as improving access and success rates in universities and colleges, developing our post-school funding system, advancing access to and quality of the College sector, redefining the SETA landscape and addressing efficiency challenges in the National Skills Fund.

We will host a higher education summit in April where we intend confronting the challenge of transformation in higher education as well as the role of universities in interacting with and strengthening other sectors of the system, particularly their articulation with the colleges. In the next few weeks I will be meeting the Chairs of Councils of our 23 universities to discuss the Soudien report on racial and other discrimination at higher education institutions. The meetings are also aimed at strengthening good governance at our institutions.

Expansion of the post-school education system

As part of Government's commitment to strengthen our skills and human resource base, we intend to broaden access to post-school education over time. I have previously indicated that the shape of our post-secondary system is not appropriately balanced between universities and colleges. Whilst access to universities must increase, enrolment in colleges should double in the next five years. However, for 2010, we anticipate that enrolments in both universities and colleges will not expand substantially.

For Universities, expansion of the system will be preceded by the careful prior development of capacity as part of our enrolment planning process with the sector: Enrolments must be matched to available resources, physical, human and financial. The average annual growth rate in head count student enrolments between 2005 (the base year for the enrolment planning process) and 2008 was 2.8%, compared to the target rate of 2.0% set in October 2007 by the Ministry of Education. The data available shows that student enrolments surged above these averages between 2007 and 2008. The head count student enrolment total rose from 761 000 in 2007 to 799 000 in 2008; an increase of 38 000 or 5%. The Full-Time Equivalent enrolled total, which is an indicator of the student load carried by the higher education system, rose from 519 000 in 2007 to 540 000 in 2008; an increase of 21 000 or 4%. Enrolments in Science and Technology majors grew at a rate of only 1.1% pa, between 2005 and 2008; compared to the target rate of 2.9% pa. We are awaiting the enrolment data for 2009, but understand that a further surge in headcount was experienced in many Universities. Work has begun on the second Cycle of System and Institutional Enrolment Planning.

Increase in access, particularly of the poor and the working class, must be accompanied by increases in graduation rates, and success rates at all levels of study. Success is related to institutional investment in improving teaching and learning, and in student support and the social and living conditions of students.

For colleges, whilst we believe that there is latent capacity in the system to increase enrolment, we are cognizant of the need to consolidate a sector that has undergone enormous change over the last years. 2010 will be utilized to deepen quality initiatives in readiness for expansion, to consolidate the various initiatives we have undertaken with SETA and Universities of Technology which aim to increase the responsiveness of the colleges to the needs of the workplace, and to manage the transition of the colleges from a provincial to a national function. Once the registration period is over, we will be able to report if colleges have been able to increase their enrolment from the 2009 figure of 120 000. It must be noted that this is a nearly five-fold increase from the 2007 figure of 25 000 and a period of stabilization may be necessary after major expansion.

We will however be expanding access to learnership programmes in 2010.

The NSC Results

Much has been said in the past week regarding the outcome of the matric results. We are aware that a large number of students did not pass the NSC Grade 12 examinations and that less than 20% of the 2009 school leavers qualified to apply for degree study. Our message is: there is a range of education and training opportunities for all of these young people, and every young person must face the future with hope, confident of the support of their family and community. We will today outline some of the options available to the class of 2009.

We are also aware that it is the children of the poor who are disproportionately represented amongst those who do not succeed, and who are underrepresented amongst those who excel. We know that consequences of poverty prevent these young people from achieving their potential. Our message to these young people is: you can succeed despite difficult circumstances. We are determined that students from quintile 1 schools who have qualified to be accepted into University must receive financial support from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Higher Education South Africa (HESA) shares this commitment and will assist us to identify such students and to work with us to put in place long term systemic interventions to ensure greater access of academically deserving from poor communities.

The results NCV and GETC results

The achievement of the young people and adults who have recently written the National Certificate (Vocational), or FET college results, and the General Education and Training Certificate or Adult Basic Education and Training Level 4 results illustrate different post-school learning pathways and provide inspiring role models of a life-long commitment to learning.

The National Certificate (Vocational) enrolled 93 293 candidates on Level 2, 24 637 candidates on Level 3 and 4 991 candidates on Level 4. The total number of question papers was 209, representing 805 618 subject enrolments on level 2, 232 698 subject enrolments on level 3 and 50 992 subject enrolments on level 4. These examinations were written at 264 examination centres. The examination was for students offering the National Certificate (Vocational), Levels 2-4. Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, convened on 21 December 2009 and approved the FET College results for final publication. The Quality Assurance Council was satisfied that no incident or process compromised the credibility of the 2009 college examinations as a whole, and the 2009 results were declared fair and credible and released to candidates on 30 December 2009.

For the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), the 89 290 candidates in 2009 was a substantial increase of 29 000 on the 60 000 candidates registered in 2008. As many as 41 315 (46%) of those adults writing the ABET GETC were between 20 and 29 years of age. This is an age group we consider still to be youth, and all of these young people would have spent a considerable part, if not all, of their school years in a post-democratic South African Education system. Whatever the reason for their not having completed school, this success in their 'second chance' must be applauded and is a great source of pride to us. Their success is a powerful example to many young people who face similar challenges.

The upper age range of the ABET cohort of 2009 confirms the adage that no person is ever too old to learn. 685 of those who wrote in 2009 were over the age of 60 and one had reached the age of 99 years. We salute the commitment and determination of people deprived of education who have remained determined to achieve their potential. Such learners must be encouraged and celebrated for the exemplary example they are setting to our younger generations about the value of education.

I wish to thank Mr. John Volmink, the Chair of Umalusi for the diligent quality assurance work undertaken by Umalusi. We are aware of the challenges that have been identified in improving the quality of the conduct of these examinations, and the department we will respond to these challenges during the course of 2010. I also want to extend a special thanks to the Examinations Section in the Department of Education, as well as to all the staff of our Colleges and Public Adult Learning Centres for their professional commitment and hard work.

Post-school opportunities

Our immediate challenge as we begin the year is to present a menu of opportunities to the Class of 2009. We congratulate all the learners who passed their NSC examinations and encourage those who have not performed well not to lose heart or hope as learning is a life-long experience. Of the 552 073 learners who

wrote the Grade 12 examinations last year, 334 718 passed. On each learner's result slip it has stated "Admission to Bachelor's Degree or Diploma or Certificate Studies". Few young people understand what this means. We encourage learners who need guidance in interpreting their results and or on options available to them to call our hotline 0800 20 29 33.

Universities, Comprehensive Universities and Universities of Technology

The Bachelor's Degree endorsement can be seen as the equivalent of the previous "matric exemption" and allows the learner access to university study. While 109 697 qualify for entry, acceptance is dependent on the criteria set by the individual universities for different courses of study. It also needs to be considered that universities close their application process before the end of the previous year. Some universities may accept late applications in courses where vacancies still exist.

The 225 021 learners who passed "without endorsement" qualify for diploma or certificate studies are eligible for entry into Universities of Technology, comprehensive institutions or colleges which may include a variety of vocational opportunities and colleges that are vocationally specific such as nursing and agriculture.

Colleges

Universities are only one of the post-school education and training options. We believe that Colleges must become institutions of choice and will play a critical role in preparing young people for economic participation. We encourage school leavers to make use of the vocational learning opportunities in our FET colleges. There are 50 Colleges encompassing as many as 120 sites across the country.

Financial Assistance for Financially Needy Students at Universities and Colleges

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme supports students at both universities and college. Applications are made at the institutions when students apply. We are cognizant of the hardships brought about by the recent economic crisis. Many breadwinners have lost their jobs putting the education of some of our brightest minds at risk. We remain committed to providing financial assistance through the NSFAS to the most financially needy students. We are pleased that NSFAS will assist those receiving assistance with 'up-front' payments. We have ensured that NSFAS communicates with institutions regarding this facility which will help financially needy students to register timeously.

Work-based Education and Training – including learnerships

To those learners for whom full-time study is not an option, and who wish to enter the world of work, we advise that they pursue opportunities in the SETA's for learnerships, apprenticeships and skills programmes. The Department of Higher Education and Training is working with the SETAs and the NSF to make more learnerships available in 2010.

We are pleased to announce that the SETA's will be recruiting 35 000 learners into these programmes during 2010. A further 2 500 will receive opportunities for skilling into creating their own new ventures.

Through the National Skills Fund, we will pledge R500m towards a special project to roll out learning programmes targeting those matriculants not meeting university or college entrance requirements. The SETAs will be requested to match this amount towards learning programmes in areas of demand in their sectors.

We are extremely pleased that 13 200 graduates of the NCV programmes and higher education institutions will also be placed into the workplace by the SETA's during 2010. Increasingly we will seek closer alignment between colleges, universities of technology and work experience.

This information is being provided now but the detail will be announced during February. We request learners to register their CV's with the SETA's, and labour centres in the provincial offices of the Department of labour. Contact details for these are available on the Department of Labour and Department of Education websites respectively.

Adult education centres

Young people and adults who have not completed schooling are invited to join a public adult learning centre where registration is possible for a General Education and Training Certificate (ABET level 4). If a young person or adult wishes to complete Grade 12, this can be completed at a public adult learning centre. Participation in any of these programmes in Public Adult Learning Centres is free.

Scarce and Critical Skills

While every person should pursue a career according to choice, we need to encourage study and professions which will help meet the needs of our economy. We have a target to produce at least 12 500 artisans per annum, which requires a dramatic increase of the average qualification rate of 5 600 per year.

The national scarce skills list includes:

- Engineering and built environment professions
- Health professions
- Finance professions
- Law professions
- City planners
- IT/ICT professions
- Natural science professions
- Management professions
- Education professions
- Transport professions
- Artisans and technicians such as Engineering, ICT and Science Technicians, Automotive and Engineering Technicians and Trades Workers, Construction trades, Other trades, printing, packaging and textile and wood
- Agriculture professions

In KwaZulu Natal, we have been monitoring applications for higher education, and have established that the top 10 programmes that students are applying for include both degrees (offered at universities) and diplomas currently offered at universities of technology. These are Bachelor degrees in Education, Social Work, Nursing, Law, Social Science and Psychology; and Diploma courses in Information Technology, Human Resource Management, Emergency Medical Care and Pharmacy.

What this data indicates is that students are opting increasingly for focused occupation specific qualifications and confirms that the need and demand outstrips the number of places available for these programmes.

The 2010 Academic Year

With regard to stakeholders in the University sub-system, in the past week, I have held meetings with HESA and the South African Union of Students (SAUS) to discuss, primarily, the 2010 academic year and what can be done to ensure that registration proceeds smoothly in all institutions and that learning and

teaching begin as soon as possible as because of the 2010 Soccer World Cup and the shorter academic year.

HESA has assured me that all options will be investigated and used to ensure that students that are both academically deserving and financially needy will not be excluded on financial grounds. We have agreed that HESA will work within the sector to ensure best practice is in place for reviewing academic performance across higher education institutions, and that these are fairly and consistently applied.

We also agreed that potential high achievers must be assisted to find their way into the education and training system. The Department and HESA will work together to seek long term systemic interventions to ensure greater access – and to ensure that no academically deserving student especially from our poorest communities is without financial support.

My discussions with SAUS included a framework for negotiations of fees, shortage of student accommodation, student funding and improving career guidance. We have agreed importantly on keeping the channels of communication open to ensure that we have a successful academic year.

With regard to interaction with stakeholders in the College sub-system, I have met key stakeholders including the South African College Principals' Organization towards the end of 2009 in order to prepare for 2010. We have established an office to monitor enrolment patterns at colleges and to monitor oversubscription in particular programmes.

On our part, the Department of Higher Education and Training has a dedicated task team monitoring the registration process both at universities and at colleges will be ready to intervene should the need arise. A dedicated helpline is available for students at the DHET: 012 3125250 or 012 3125277.

NSFAS

The Ministerial Committee reviewing the National Student Financial Aid Scheme was scheduled to hand in the report on their findings in December. However, they requested a month's extension in order to finalise their recommendations on several key aspects on the scheme. The report will now be handed to me at the end of this month and we intend releasing it for public comment at the end of February. The NSFAS review is aimed at incremental realization of the right to free education at undergraduate level for the financially needy and what would be the best methods to achieve this.

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