



THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE STATEMENT ON THE POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR STATE OF READINESS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022 HELD AT THE GCIS – PRETORIA

1 February 2022

Programme Director Mr Ishmael Mnisi

Deputy Minister, Mr Buti Manamela;

Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi;

DDGs Present;

Prof Ramneek Ahluwalia of Higher Health;

Mr Board Chair of NSFAS Ernest Khosa, and CEO Mr Andile Nongogo;

Chairpersons and CEOs of all our entities;

Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, TVET and CET Principals

Labour Unions;

Student formations

Members of the media

Fellow South Africans

We welcome you all to our first media briefing of the year 2022. I called this briefing to share with the public our readiness for the opening of the 2022 Post School Education and Training 2022 academic year.

First and foremost, let me congratulate the matric class of 2021 NSC who got an overall pass rate standing at 76.4% an improvement of 0.2% from the pass rate achieved by the class of 2020.

This represents a record of five hundred and thirty-seven thousand, six hundred and eighty-seven (537 687) candidates who passed the 2021 NSC examinations.

All of these are potential candidates to be absorbed into our Post School Education and Training sector.

I also congratulate all the learners who passed their November 2021 National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] Level 2-4 examinations which are administered by my Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

I also wish to take this opportunity urge those who have not made it, to explore the range of opportunities for training, learnerships and internships in the skills development section of the PSET sector, over and above second chance matric opportunities.

Our skills development system will be offering about 100 000 opportunities through our SETAs, including but not limited to learnerships, which provide both theory and practical workplace training, where learners are paid a learnership allowance regulated in terms of the

National Minimum Wage Act (Act No.9 of 2018); including apprenticeship (artisanal trades).

Additional opportunities in this case will be announce in the next few week as we finalise our work in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen

The last two years have been extremely tough for the Post School, Education and Training Sector.

However, I am proud that our system has remained resilient, despite the numerous challenges of funding constraints, COVID-19 restrictions and new forms of teaching and learning.

For our university sector, the number of students who deregistered remains low for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

For undergraduate students the percentage of dropouts is at 2% and for postgraduate students it is at 3%.

As a sector we have ensured that we support our students who needed electronic devices such as laptops.

The average across the system is that 73% of students who require laptops have been supported to obtain one, with NSFAS students at an average of 87%.

It is our hope that students will prioritise the use of their allowances to prioritise essential equipment to support their learning at university.

Data provision required for online access for teaching and learning and assessments remained high across the system. The average across the system for all university graduate (UG) students is 86%. It is for this reason that we will be engaging the Minister of Communication and Digital Technologies on dedicated spectrum for post-school education and training, so we are able to effectively access, sustain and use digital technologies in support of education and training.

For the most part, students who are on campus and in residences are able to access university wi-fi services.

Our Universities, TVET Colleges and Community Education Colleges and Skills centres have generally reported high levels of student participation in teaching and learning, assessment and testing in 2021, as greater numbers of students were able to access campuses and skills centres.

This gives hope that in 2022, we should expect decreased numbers of students not consistently engaged in learning and teaching and training, as our PSET institutions have now devised strategies to deal with the difficulties presented by COVID-19 and Lockdowns.

I would like to thank the leadership of our PSET system, comprising of universities, TVETs, CETs and Skills centres management, the academic and support staff, labour unions and the students for their resilience and commitment to ensure that we successfully completed the 2021 academic year.

We have worked well together in facing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. I wish you all the strength for the 2022 academic year.

Ladies and gentlemen

ON VACCINATION

COVID-19 remains a challenge as we start the 2022 academic year.

The PSET system has been immensely creative and adaptive in the management of our response to the pandemic through our “Save Lives, Save the Academic Year, and Science and Innovation and campaigns.

A Special Cabinet meeting held yesterday, 31st January approved changes to the Adjusted Alert Level 1 COVID- 19 regulations. This follows meetings of the National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) and the President’s Coordinating Council (PCC) which received updates on the management of COVID 19 in South Africa.

The information gathered through the system used by the Department of Health has reported that South Africa has exited the fourth wave nationally.

Now this development means that 2022 is promising to be an academic year less disrupted by lockdown periods and restricted access to classes, if no new waves or variants surge again.

To the extent that COVID-19 restrictions are eased, more and more contact learning and teaching is possible, and as levels of vaccination increase, more students will have access to on-campus services.

In line with the approach of the NCCC and Cabinet, I would like to encourage everyone in our higher education and training community to get vaccinated. ***Vaccination is safe and saves lives.***

As we move towards full contact learning and teaching and on-campus activities, and full return to residences, it is necessary to ensure that staff and students have access to safe campus environments, which is greatly assisted by a high level of the population being vaccinated.

Currently, HIGHER HEALTH, our implementing agency, that is guiding institutions on the management of the pandemic, is consulting scientific experts in drawing up guidelines that institutions can follow in determining various matters around vaccination.

Whilst we are awaiting the finalisation of these guidelines in relation to vaccine mandates and the management of the academic year which I intend to prioritise urgently.

I urge all institutions to ensure that the policies and procedures they put in place have been widely consulted upon.

However, we must point out that the Deputy President is leading a process of consultations on the issue of vaccine mandates.

However, it is important that in navigating this situation we must know that in terms of our Constitution there is no right that is absolute. Those who assert their right not to vaccinate, must also know that those who choose to vaccinate also have their rights to be protected against possible infection.

In addition, the guidelines that I will release will take into account the latest national regulations and how they will impact on PSET institutions.

University enrolments

The overall total enrolments within the public university sector have been projected to be **1 110 361** for the 2022 academic year.

First time entering enrolments have been projected at **208 299** nationally with **69 069** of these first-time entering enrolments dedicated to scarce skills areas.

They have been projected as follows:

- Engineering: 17 085
- Life and Physical Science: 17 584
- Animal Sciences: 985
- Veterinary Sciences: 209
- Human Health: 10 418
- Teacher Education: 22 788

It should be noted that a considerable portion of the spaces within scarce skills areas require a NSC Mathematics mark of at least **60%**.

We however do have a concern about the need for the improvement in the numbers of students acquiring this minimum requirement, as they are less than the required numbers.

To further enable access to all our institutions, we have opened our Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) on the 24th January 2022, following the release of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results.

CACH will close on the 30th March 2022 and the services are available from Mondays to Friday between **8am to 6pm** and Saturday from **8am to 2pm**.

Students can access CACH through:

- a WhatsApp “**Hello**” message to **078 776 8660**
- an online self-service at **www.cach.ac.za**
- USSD code ***134*225#**

CACH communication channels are:

- Facebook: CACH_SA
- Twitter: CACHSA

I would also like to acknowledge that we are aware that the CACH website was down for a period of time last week.

I am informed that all services are now up and running. Although the website was temporarily unavailable, all other communication channels continued to operate effectively.

ON TVET COLLEGES

The Department has embarked on a process to review curricula of programmes offered in TVET Colleges, in order to ensure their relevance, currency and alignment to needs of industry and society.

Twenty two (22) more subjects have been revised with the N4 Business and Services Studies subjects being implemented in the first semester 2022 and the N5 in the second semester.

The N4 Engineering Studies revised subjects will be implemented in the first trimester of 2022 and N5 in the second trimester.

TVET Colleges are continuously updated on the revised subjects and how to access relevant curriculum documents through circulars. I will elaborate further on this during the 2022 Department Budget Vote Statement.

TVET Colleges enrolments

Our planned 2022 headcount students enrolments into the ministerial approved programmes is **508 000** which is lower than the 2022/21 headcount enrolments funded by the state and TVET Colleges from students fees.

It is also substantially lower than the envisaged enrolment growth expected by the National Development Plan.

Therefore, the 2022 enrolment planning for the TVET colleges will only be funded by the State at **R14.385** billion with a correlating budget deficit of **R165 million** or **1.15%** funding deficit.

When it relates to the enrolments themselves, we have implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) with seven (7) sub processes in all our fifty (50) Colleges.

We continue to monitor this process through our regional and national office oversight teams.

We have been utilising both online and manual systems to process student applications and registrations since the 17th January to date for both new and returning students.

I now want to share with you the Business Studies and NCV 2021 examination results:

A total of **135 790** candidates wrote for the November 2021 NC(V) examinations.

The number of candidates that participated in the November 2021 examinations has declined slightly by **2 561** (1.9%) compared to the number of candidates that wrote the November 2020 examinations.

As was the case in 2020 more females at **71.1%** participated in the November 2021 NC(V) examinations cycle than males at **28.9%** candidates.

The **19-24** age group made up **66.5%** compared **58.8%** in November 2020.

In as far as the student percentage distribution per province in 2021:

- KwaZulu-Natal had the highest wrote percentage proportion of (20.6%)
- Gauteng followed by (19.3%),
- Limpopo (18.1%)
- Eastern Cape (12.9%)
- The lowest percentage of those wrote was recorded in North West (5.1%) and followed by Northern Cape (1.0%).

We had a total of **898 907** subject entries enrolled for the November 2021 NC (V) examinations, which is a **5.2%** decline compared to the subject entries enrolled for the November 2020 examinations.

We had a total of **670 729** subject entries that participated in our November 2021 NC(V) examinations, which is a decline of about 4.8% (**670 729**) compared with the **702 824** of those who participated in the November 2020 examinations.

This is a serious point of concern to me that I had to request my Department of Higher Education and Training to provide detailed analysis of factors that might have contributed to this decline, over

and above the challenges imposed by COVID 19 and the legacy issues that affects TVET Colleges.

This data will assist us to be able to provide the necessary support to both our TVET College Management and Students for their optimal performance.

I would also like to appeal to all our prospective students who are still seeking spaces within our TVET colleges for Entry Level Programmes (ELP) to contact their colleges of choice for available enrolment spaces for the academic year 2022.

ON COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our Community Education and Training calendar is aligned to that of the Basic Education Department because the majority of our centres operate in the schools.

Inland CET Colleges have commenced their academic programme from the 12th January and Coastal CET colleges commenced on the 19th January .

ON FEES AND OTHER FINANCIAL MATTERS

There has been some public interest in the fee increases within the university sector.

I would like to point out that fee increases are agreed upon in the sector as part of a social compact that has been in place since 2016, the only year when fees were not increased.

Since 2016, we have worked together with the sector on inflation-linked increases, to ensure that fee increases remain affordable.

In this regard, for the 2022 academic year, a CPI increase to a maximum of **4.23%** for tuition **fees** and CPI+2 to a maximum of **6.23%** on **accommodation fees** has been proposed.

We recognise that the long-term stability and sustainability of the sector relies in a significant measure on tuition and residence fee income to universities, and we are working on a fee regulatory policy framework.

I must indicate that last year (2021), we have made significant progress on this matter.

It should also be noted that the costs of providing university education continue to increase, and it is therefore not sustainable to consider lower than inflation fee increases. Fee increases are necessitated by obvious factors, including, increase in workers' wages and staff salaries, increase in electricity and water tariffs, rising food prices, books and learning materials, and generally the rise in inflation.

At the same time, student debt has grown in the university sector. The unaudited data showed that an estimated **R6.1 billion** was owed by students at the start of the 2021 academic year.

Audited accumulated gross student debt as at 31 December 2020 is **R16.5 million**. The amount is inclusive of students who have exited the universities with debt.

A survey conducted by the Department in 2021 showed that an estimated **56.2%** of students with debt owe less than **R10 000**, **32.9%** owe between **R10 000 and R50 000** and **10.9%** owe more than **R50 000**.

The survey also showed that NSFAS students owe **R5.3 billion**.

It should be noted that Government has contributed **R1.7 billion** to NSFAS as a result of the due diligence exercise that was undertaken in 2018 towards the historic debt of registered qualifying NSFAS students.

This was in the main targeting eligible students who were subject to the **R122 000** family income threshold and NSFAS funding cap.

This work between NSFAS and institutions is currently underway.

In addressing matters of student financial aid and student debt, the Department is hard at work developing recommendations for a comprehensive student financial aid model for the future.

This model will incorporate the existing funding available from the State, and exploring alternative funding sources.

While we are concerned about the long-term sustainability of the fully-subsidised funding for students from poor and working class backgrounds, we are also concerned about students considered to be in

the “missing middle” and the need for more postgraduate funding opportunities.

In 2021, I appointed a Ministerial Task Team to support the development of a new student financial aid policy and I am looking forward to receiving the report from the MTT in the first half of 2022.

I however must indicate that the Ministerial Task Team has already started engaging the banking community and progress has been made in this regard.

I must indicate that for the current term, we are in discussions with the Banking Association of South Africa on work that needs to be done to develop a possible loan scheme for students falling outside the NSFAS funding regime.

For missing middle students, there are also other funding opportunities available both at institution level and other sources.

We urge that those who are looking for financial support to contact their financial aid offices at their respective institutions.

We have also identified the support from the SETAs funding for directly fund the missing.

NSFAS funding

Students from poor and working-class backgrounds had from 2nd November 2021 to the 21st January 2022 to apply for NSFAS bursaries to

further their studies at public Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges (TVET) or Universities.

This allowed applicants who received their National Senior Certificate (NSC) results the opportunity to apply.

NSFAS initiated a system improvement process to improve the turnaround time and facilitate speedy provisional funding decisions for students using third party sources such as Home Affairs, Department of Basic Education (DBE), SASSA and SARS data.

With this initiative all first-time entering students that were successfully verified as SASSA beneficiaries received immediate confirmation of funding upon submitting a complete application to NSFAS.

NSFAS has received **906,429** applications during the 2022 Application period, of which **85%** have not studied at a public University before.

In comparison to the number of applications received over the last three years, we have observed a sharp increase in the demand for NSFAS bursaries this year.

I am happy to report that we will be able to fund all qualifying students on the DHET bursary scheme who have been admitted for funded programmes at public TVET colleges and universities in 2022. Further details will be provided by NSFAS including the appeals process.

I will soon be releasing the revised NSFAS Funding Eligibility and Terms and Conditions for 2022, within the next few days.

Of major concern to me and NSFAS are students who continue to defraud the system by failing to disclose improvements in household income or the student has obtained a new funder or knowingly submits false information.

According to the analysis performed to a cohort of 2021 students, NSFAS has established that **38,744** continuing students in TVET Colleges and Universities continue to be funded even though they have realised substantial improvement in household income over the funded period.

Of these, **32,654** have a household income that exceeds **R400,000**.

Our analysis further shows that **7,081** of these students have a household income that exceeds **R1,000,000** and **632** students have a household income that exceeds **R2,000,000**.

These students will be de-funded. However, NSFAS must take lodge criminal charges of fraud in such instances, though the affected students may at the same time be afforded the opportunity to lodge an appeal.

NSFAS reserves the right to litigate and recover funds where instances of clear defrauding of the system have been identified.

NSFAS is in the last stages of implementing a new disbursement of allowances tool that will enable the organisation to accept registration data and process students allowances speedily and accurately.

The first payments for the 2022 academic year will be processed via this new system.

Other initiatives that the NSFAS Board has approved include:

- Direct Distribution of Allowances to students
- Central platform for the management of Student Accommodation

These are envisaged to be implemented (piloted) in the first half of 2022.

Historic debt

NSFAS has undertaken a process called **Close Out Project** to deal with historic debt as well as the historic challenges of outstanding data reconciliation between NSFAS and our Institutions.

The Close Out Project emanated from the data challenges that were brought about by the 2017 NSFAS implementation of the student-centred model for our 26 universities and 50 TVET Colleges.

This Close Out Project, therefore, aims to complete all the work relating to funding of students and disbursement of allowances for the academic years 2017 to 2020.

While there has been active participation from some universities and TVET Colleges in this process, it is of concern that there are institutions which did not provide the required feedback to NSFAS in order to finalize the reconciliation exercise.

To date NSFAS is ready to provide Close Out and Historic Debt status reports to universities that have submitted their files for the in-scope years.

I have noted that there are sixteen (16) universities that have fully submitted their files, with ten (10) have one or two years outstanding, fifteen (15) TVET colleges have not submitted their files while, 11 have partially submitted and 19 have fully submitted.

We once again urge all outstanding institutions to submit their full reconciliation files to NSFAS by no later than end of February 2021. Institutions that are not honouring this process will continue to prejudice students that can be resolved to resume their studies.

ON REGISTRATION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND PRIVATE COLLEGES

The Department of Higher Education and Training has the statutory authority to regulate the private provisioning of college programmes and higher education programmes.

Whilst the legislation and administration are in place, the mushrooming of illegal colleges and illegal practices is still a concern for the Department. This is an area where the Department works with law enforcement agencies in the country.

The public is, therefore, requested to be vigilant and not fall for the bogus operators who are only interested in money and do not offer accredited programmes.

Potential students may verify the registration of private colleges and private higher institutions by:

- a. Consulting the respective Registers on the website of the Department at www.dhet.gov.za;
- b. Contacting the Call Centre at 0800 87 2222; and
- c. SMS or send "Please Call Me": 072 204 5056.

The Department has also become aware that there are several private colleges and institutions that are purporting to offer qualifications without approval from the Department and/or the relevant Quality Councils (QCs).

Furthermore, the Department continues to receive complaints on the poor quality of programme offerings by some colleges and institutions.

It has also become evident that whilst some colleges are duly registered, some sneak in un-accredited and un-registered programmes and qualifications.

Therefore, even if an institution is registered, they have the legal obligation to ensure that the programmes and qualifications for which they seek to enrol are accredited and registered.

The same registers I have referred to above also contain information on each and every legitimate programme and qualification accredited and registered to the registered institutions.

Moreover, the public must not be misled by false advertisements which illegally promise internationally recognised qualifications.

All programmes and qualifications offered by duly registered institutions must be accredited by the relevant Quality Councils in South Africa and must be reflected as such against the name of each institution that appears in the registers.

Lastly, I would like to thank all stakeholders within the post school education and training sector who I have been in consultation with yesterday and this morning about our state of readiness for the 2022 academic year.

Thank you very much to all of you for your contributions.

I thank you all.

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