



**MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION
STATEMENT ON PLANS FOR THE REOPENING OF POST SCHOOL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS AND THE CONTRIBUTION
OF SCIENCE AND INNOVATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19**

18 January 2021

Programme Director;

Deputy Minister Buti Manamela;

Directors General Dr Phil Mjwara and Gwebinkundla Qonde

DDGs from both the departments;

Scientists present;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen

Our public statement today on the reopening of the post-school education and training institutions (PSET), the developments and contributions of science and innovation in the fight against COVID 19 follows numerous addresses by the President on the impact of COVID 19 on our communities and their livelihoods.

This COVID-19 crisis is connected to a wider set of crises; of social inequality, of climate change, of technological disruption, and linked to all of the above: a crisis of the global capitalist system.

This epidemic has dominated our minds and hearts in the year 2020 and seems will do the same this year. It has brought unprecedented challenges for the leadership and management of both our PSET sector and our national system of innovation (NSI).

We had to change the manner in which we allocated our human and financial resources, we had to mobilise all our stakeholders in both these sectors, so that as government and all our stakeholders could in unison agree on a common programme for implementation.

Indeed, it has not been easy road to travel, but it has been made rewarding because Government has worked very closely with our stakeholders.

We have continued with ongoing consultations with all our stakeholders through the Ministerial Task Team on PSET, which comprises of representatives from Universities South Africa (USAf), the South African Public College Organisation (SAPCO) Labour Unions, and the South Africa Student Union and (SAUS).

On our science and innovation interventions we continue to work with our sister Department of Health, the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC); Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAF); KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform (KRISP); our entities the

Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR); Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and National Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (NIHSS); Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) and the Biovac Institute, pharmaceutical company partly owned by government.

I will commence my media briefing by reporting on some of the most significant science and innovation interventions to date.

As the Department of Science and Innovation, we have to date invested R68 766 000 (reprioritised from the 2019/20 and 2020/21 budget allocation) towards COVID-19 research and development (R&D) activities.

These funds were approved to support COVID-19 Research and Development in the areas of diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, surveillance and epidemiology, including genomic epidemiology.

ON VACCINES

The demand for an effective national COVID-19 vaccination plan, and the threat of future pandemics, has thrust the country's ability to develop and manufacture vaccines locally into the spotlight.

Government, through the Department of Science and Innovation, owns a 47,5% stake in Biovac, a bio-pharmaceutical company, which is a joint venture with the private sector.

The company has over the years developed the capability to manufacture vaccines.

Last year I launched an initiative which sees Biovac manufacturing Hexaxim in partnership with Sanofi. Hexaxim is the world's first fully liquid hexavalent (6-in-1) vaccine and protects against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis B, Haemophilus influenzae type B, and poliomyelitis.

Hexaxim is the first World Health Organization Expanded Programme on Immunization vaccine to be manufactured in South Africa, and is a strong indication of the technical abilities of South African scientists.

There are two studies currently being supported in the area of vaccines.

The first is a study on **plant-based manufacturing of antibodies for COVID-19**, which aims to facilitate the rapid development of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines, therapeutic antibodies and diagnostic reagents utilising various expression platforms for advancing the production of SARS-CoV-2 vaccine candidates and reagents.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has entered into an agreement with Kentucky Biological Products (KBP) for the potential manufacturing of the antigen of their vaccine. The KBP vaccine is manufactured using specific tobacco plants.

The CSIR has the ability to expand their current facility for plant-based expression systems to manufacture the antigen needed for the vaccine. KBP has also expressed interest in testing their vaccine in South Africa.

The total investment in this initiative is about R2,4 million.

The second is a **ChAdOx1-nCoV-19 vaccine trial**. In partnership with the South African Medical Research Council, the Department is co-funding a study, led by the University of the Witwatersrand, aimed at assessing the safety, immunogenicity and efficacy of a COVID-19 vaccine candidate (ChAdOx1 SARS-CoV-2) in South African adults living without HIV, as well as safety and immunogenicity in a small cohort of adults living with HIV.

This is part of an international study aimed at finding a vaccine that will prevent infection by the virus that causes COVID-19, but also assessing whether the vaccines will be effective in local settings.

The vaccine was developed at the Oxford University Jenner Institute, in collaboration with AstraZeneca, and it is currently being trialed in a number of countries, including South Africa, Brazil, USA, UK, Australia and Europe. Preliminary results indicate that this vaccine could reduce virus transmission based on an observed reduction in asymptomatic infections.

The results indicate that the vaccine is at least 62% effective when given in two full-strength doses, compared to the 94% percent efficacy achieved by Pfizer and Moderna candidate vaccines.

Of the few vaccines approved globally, the Oxford vaccine (while not as effective as the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines) has been touted as the most suitable for developing countries due to its cost, and because it is comparatively easy to transport, store and distribute.

This vaccine is currently being considered for approval by the European Medicines Agency. Approval has been granted by the regulatory authorities in the UK, India, Mexico, Bangladesh and Argentina. This initiative is funded to the amount of **R4,5 million**.

ON COVID 19 VARIANTS

Genomic research has proved to be a potent tool in the fight against COVID-19. Investigations by South African genomic scientists into the evolutionary characteristics of SARS-CoV-2 resulted in the detection of the new variant, dubbed 501Y.V2.

The research conducted by local scientists from the KwaZulu-Natal Research Informatics and Sequencing Programme (KRISP) should be applauded.

They were the first in the world to uncover the findings, showing that the 501Y.V2 variant has a number of mutations on its spike protein, which increases the efficacy of the virus to infect humans and potentially posing problems of vaccine escape.

This work is continuing through the Department of Science and Innovation, and we have allocated KRISP R25 million over the next 12 months to complete the sequencing of 10 000 SARS-CoV-2 genomes in South Africa and the rest of the African continent.

The funding will be used to understand the spread of COVID-19 and other virus lineages in Africa, and to support clinical and laboratory investigations of genomic variations in the country.

In this regard our key task now is to get a better understanding of the mechanisms of increased transmissibility (which is increasingly supported by data) and if there is any evidence of increased pathogenicity (a different disease profile/progression), or whether reinfection can occur.

Our scientists continue to work with their international counterparts to ensure that knowledge is pooled in order to bring COVID-19 under control.

The Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) has also funded local clinical trials and its facilities continue to track the evolution/mutation of SARS-CoV-2 lineages.

Scientists from the DSI funded KRISP, and have been meeting with the world's top scientists every two weeks to discuss the evolution of SARS-CoV-2 lineages. The centre has been sequencing SARS-CoV-2 genomes locally and sharing its findings.

Beyond these measures, the Department of Science and Innovation is also working closely with agencies such as BIOVAC to investigate a long-term strategy for a robust and integrated national science and innovation platform to reduce South Africa's vulnerability against pandemic outbreaks.

We will also be working with other government departments as well as the private and development sectors in this regard.

On the national science and innovation sector, we will be convening a Panel of Scientists to provide a platform for scientists to share with society on what science is saying about the role of vaccination in our fight against COVID-19. They will also openly discuss the implication of the new variant on the current vaccines and myths about vaccination both biomedical and social science issues.

I will also be convening an Imbizo, through the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and the National Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (NIHSS), of social scientists humanities specialists to analyse and come-up with concrete suggestions to government and society as a whole on how to deal with the psycho-social impact of covid-19 on families, communities and society as a whole.

I will now brief you on our interventions in the Post School Education and Training sector.

ON DEATHS DUE TO COVID 19

As a sector we mourn the losses of our staff and students in our PSET institutions, NSI and all our entities. I would like to once-more send my deepest condolences to their families, friends and colleagues of all those who succumbed to this pandemic.

UNIVERSITIES:

The total number of COVID-19 positive cases reported across universities are 3 088 (1 499 staff and 1 588 students) as at 13 November 2020. The total number of deaths: 58 (48 staff and 10 students) as at 13 November 2020.

We will be receiving an updated report on infections and fatalities at our universities in the report due on the 20th January 2021, this coming Wednesday. However, we have already had the very sad news that forty-eight (48) staff members and ten (10) students had passed on last year on Covid related causes. We know that infections will have risen over the festive season.

ON TVET:

Based on our current cumulative reporting period between 15 Dec 2020 to 11 Jan 2021, I can report the following Covid-19 related cases in our sector:

Staff Infections - 146

Staff Recoveries – 123

Staff fatalities- 23

ON CET:

Infection cases – 98 (of which **21** students, 3 support staff and 74 lecturers)

Recoveries – 85 (of which 20 were students, 3 support staff and 62 lecturers)

Fatalities – 4 (of which 1 was a student and 3 lecturers)

ON SETAS:

Infection cases – 57

Recoveries – 51

Fatalities – 4

Given that the system has been closed for the festive season, it was not possible to collect further data. The Department will continue to collect data as soon as the sector fully reopens and we will continue to update the public on the situation as it develops.

ON HIGHER HEALTH

HIGHER HEALTH, the health, wellness and development 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 the beginning of the pandemic within South Africa.

Working with other experts, scientists and stakeholders, especially the World Health Organisation (WHO), the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), our sister Department of Health, and other agencies, HIGHER HEALTH together built comprehensive programmes, systems, controls and infrastructure for our sectoral response to COVID-19. This included the establishment of guidelines, protocols and capacity building – which is all grounded in science.

You will recall that I launched the PSET COVID-19 Guidelines as early as April 2020 and subsequently launched nine (9) sets of different protocols guiding our campuses, including protocols for managing cluster outbreaks and invigilation of exams during COVID-19.

These protocols played a very significant role towards the successful closure of the 2020 academic year as thousands of our students have already written exams and many more will be writing in the coming weeks and months.

To this end, we have updated all COVID protocols, guidelines and training materials with the evolving scientific advancements, to enable retraining and strengthening management and frontline teams for the re-opening of institutions during level lockdown 3 this year.

We are gratified to report that as much as the focus and emphasis has been on COVID-19, HIGHER HEALTH continues the good work of providing

services on other student health and wellness challenges and epidemics, including mental health, gender-based violence and HIV, amongst others. Our approach in the sector is that whilst focusing on Covid 19, we must however not lose focus on the other health and welfare challenges in the sector.

I am pleased to report that during the lockdown, over **100,000** students, across our campuses, continued receiving HIV services, and contraceptive support. Thousands of young women received access to reporting and subsequent GBV support services, and the HIGHER HEALTH 24 HOUR STUDENT HELPLINE for Mental Health and GBV established in August 2020, has to date managed more than **5 000** crisis calls.

The increasing strain placed on mental health and GBV by the COVID-19 pandemic is undeniable and therefore the helpline remains available to support and save lives. I urge all students to access this free helpline number **0800 363636**. I repeat **0800 363636**.

On the 11th January 2021, the HIGHER HEALTH team started re-training all our institutional and campus COVID task teams in order to respond to the pandemic.

Further rigorous training on campus has started for frontline workers, student and staff volunteers so they can be redeployed across our campuses to manage COVID-19.

HIGHER HEALTH will also work with each institution to strengthen daily screening of staff, students and any service provider entering our campuses.

We have capacitated and developed over **30 000** campus-based frontline institutional staff and student volunteers. Among them are residence officers (on-campus, off-campus and private accommodation), management, student support services, campus security and the cleaning staff.

This existing capacity will be directed to assist as we deal with the second wave through the re-establishment of screening stations close to campus entrances.

These in-person resources are supported by the HIGHER HEALTH digital screening tool, HealthCheck, which provides a digital passport to students and staff on a daily basis.

This tool assists with early detection, isolation (before leaving home/residence), and decreased congestion at security gates. Thus far over **7.7 million** screenings have been done by over **1.6 million** students and staff since its launch in early June 2020.

In order to strengthen our student health and wellness services at underprivileged campuses, HIGHER HEALTH, established a District Campus Health and Wellness Mobile Clinic Health Care Programme.

These clinics played a key role in various provinces in managing last year's cluster outbreaks across our campuses. We worked closely with Department

of Health and the National Health Laboratory Services to enable early detection, isolation and further mitigating the spread of infection, across our residences and campuses.

Our strategy and plans are informed by an approach that where we experience huge increases in infections or cluster outbreak, we will immediately close the affected campuses or sites.

I have instructed HIGHER HEALTH to create a PSET strategy that is aligned with and supports the Department of Health's phased national vaccine strategy and also to coordinate its subsequent roll out. The strategy will help to ensure access to vaccination for our students and staff.

Priority for inclusion in the Phase 1 of the vaccine programme are the PSET sector frontline campus healthcare staff and health sciences students, especially from nursing, medicine and other disciplines.

Again, in sync with the Department of Health national vaccine approach, the PSET vaccination strategy will further develop a phased road map towards vaccination of all frontline and essential staff, student and staff volunteers, student support structures, as well as staff and students living with co-morbidities across all our campuses.

HIGHER HEALTH is also working closely with other government departments to build a Health Department-approved training programme for the PSET sector for a science-based awareness and education initiative on the national COVID vaccination drive.

We will train thousands of peer educators and student volunteers, with support from student leadership and our staff, to render knowledge, education and information to support the massive countrywide vaccination drive.

I urge our institutions and HIGHER HEALTH to mobilise and capacitate our own healthcare workers, staff and final-year health science students to volunteer to be trained and act as extra hands supporting the Department of Health, as it is impossible for **40 million people** to be vaccinated by a single department. In this regard, we will surely be playing our part.

In tandem we will also host public dialogues to address a range of fictions, myths and untruths often doing the rounds about vaccines, viruses, technology and human biology.

I also wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm that all vaccines that government intends securing are scientifically tested and approved by competent relevant authorities. We urge our people to desist from believing in untruths, like that 5G mobile systems cause Covid 19.

Our students will play a significant role in protecting South Africans not just because of an increased vaccinated student populace which will minimise the spreading of the virus, but because of the positive role they will play as activists for change among their families and communities.

HIGHER HEALTH in partnership with Universities South Africa (USAf), the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SASSAP), the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and in future with the South African Public College Organisation (SAPCO) and the South Africa TVET Student Association (SATVETSA), intends to forge a COVID-19 Social Compact Campaign.

Our initiative intends to unite our PSET sector leading towards beating the pandemic through social cohesion that champions and follows prevention principles.

As students head back to campus to write exams and prepare for the new academic year, it is vital to remind you that we have successfully conducted exams for millions of TVET and university students in the midst of the pandemic. And we did so effectively due to stringent and evidence-based protocols and controls. We can do this again.

We call on all students and staff not to forget to fully observe and respect the basic rules of COVID-19 conduct – social distancing, wearing a face mask, sanitising – as our educational institutions re-open. Do not waver, do not tire – the fight has not yet been won.

Together we can protect ourselves and our futures.

ON NSFAS APPLICATIONS PROCESS

NSFAS recorded over **750 000** applications for the 2021 academic year, which is a significant increase of approximately **185 000** applications (or a 25% growth) on the 2020 applications, and shows a high level of demand for funding support and access to higher education and training opportunities.

Over **460 000** (or 61%) of the applicants are SASSA beneficiaries. The vast majority of applicants were able to apply utilising the online channel, with smaller numbers of students than in previous years utilising the NYDA offices to apply, a direct result of the COVID-19 lockdown regulations.

The evaluation of applications process commenced in December 2020 and is well underway, and is due to complete in mid-February, which will be in time for funding decisions to be communicated in time for students registering for the new academic year.

While NSFAS utilised third party sources for financial eligibility verification in 2020, now NSFAS has also entered into a partnership with SARS to provide a further layer of eligibility-checking. This partnership with SARS is meant to accurately assess declared household income from SARS and compare with information that students are using to apply for NSFAS bursaries, as a further control to ensure that only deserving students are funded.

Each university and TVET college has an enrolment plan and can only admit a specific number of students. The competition for such spaces is high, especially in universities.

Students who have applied to a university should be aware that they are given a specific time to respond and accept a space, before the space is offered to another student.

Students should therefore act quickly and make a decision whether to accept the space or not if they are made an offer, to avoid the risk of losing the space. Given the high numbers of applications received for NSFAS, funding late applications will not be accepted in 2021.

ON CACH (Central Applications Clearing House)

Unfortunate reality that not all students who apply for a space at a university will be offered one. It is for this reason that the Department has developed the **Central Applications Clearing House (CACH)** which is an integrated referral service for PSET institutions and students.

The CACH is the first phase of what will in the future become the Central Applications Service (CAS) for the PSET system.

The CAS will be piloted in 2021 for entries into 2022 and is designed as a “one-stop-shop” for information and access into the PSET system – it will provide a single place for applications for study spaces in PSET institutions, accommodation and funding support through NSFAS and other schemes.

Whilst we are in the process to fully develop the CAS, the CACH acts as a 'clearing house' or referral system for students who have applied for a space in a university or a college but have not successfully secured a space.

These students can sign up for the CACH to receive career advice and referral to other opportunities in the PSET system, including being referred to other universities that still have spaces in their area of interest, TVET college opportunities, artisan development opportunities and other possibilities within the PSET system.

It should be clearly understood that CACH is not a late application service. Students who have not applied for any PSET institution should contact the Department's Career Development Service (CDS) for advice on any possibilities that may be available to them.

The CACH service will open when the National Senior Certificate results are released.

In accordance with the 2020 Department of Basic Education statement, the NSC results are due to be released on 23 February 2021, and the CACH service will therefore open on 22 February 2021 and continue until the end of April 2021.

More information about CACH 2021 will be communicated closer to the time the NSC results are released. The Career Development Service can be contacted on **086 999 0123**.

ON THE LAPTOP PROJECT

As indicated during our previous media briefing, the tender for the provision of laptops was fairly awarded on the 2nd November 2020 to five (5) bidders.

Currently NSFAS is engaging with the service providers to develop the implementation process, including specifications, ordering, order turnaround times, delivery, payment terms, warranty, support and maintenance. At the same time NSFAS is finalizing the implementation guidelines for universities and TVET colleges, which will be consulted with institutions before implementation.

NSFAS is also engaging with individual institutions to assess laptop requirements for their NSFAS students, to ensure compatibility with the relevant qualifications.

It is important to note that university students will use their learning materials allowance to buy the laptops, which they will own and will be used for the duration of their studies. Each institution will develop a policy through which this will be implemented in line with NSFAS guidelines.

NSFAS aims to complete these processes over the next few weeks, and once that is done, they will communicate specific dates to the institutions. It is anticipated that NSFAS will be able to start rolling out the first batch of devices for delivery when the 2021 academic program resumes in March.

ON DATA

As the PSET system, working in collaboration with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, we will soon resume negotiations with Mobile Network Operators (MNOs), for a long-term solution to the provision of data for students within the PSET system.

Our intention is to make sure that no student gets left behind during these turbulent times of the pandemic, but also find a sustainable long-term strategy that ensures that the PSET sector does not revert back to pre-COVID status in relation to access to online resources by students and lecturers.

Unlike in 2020, when we were dealing with one academic year, at this point in time we are dealing with the completion of the 2020 academic year and the opening of the 2021 academic year.

The DHET will be engaging with the MNOs, inter alia, MTN, Telkom and Vodacom, Cell C etc. with the intention that data becomes accessible to students.

Furthermore, we will also ensure that the zero-rating of educational websites remains a critical point. Lastly where students cannot be granted data and connectivity in areas with poor network infrastructure, we will be working towards innovative mechanisms for ensuring that they access teaching and learning support material.

ON THE COMPLETION OF THE 2020 ACADEMIC YEAR

2020 was a year like no other. After a period of recess starting in March 2020, all universities moved to remote forms of teaching and learning.

They had to adapt their systems and teaching methods to provide remote support during the early lockdown periods in line with the regulations governing the lockdown levels. Our goal was to save lives and at the same time save the academic year.

This was a challenging time for all institutions and for staff and students of universities.

My Department monitored the system against a number of indicators including eighteen (**18**) teaching and learning and fourteen (**14**) health and safety indicators, and developed nine (**9**) system wide monitoring reports covering all public universities during the lockdown period.

[There is an appendix provided alongside this statement which contains these indicators]

Significant efforts have been made across all institutions to ensure that a fair opportunity has been provided to all students to complete the 2020 academic year. This has included an inevitable extended period into the 2021 calendar year for the majority of institutions.

The Department of Higher Education and Training has provided support to institutions through the re-prioritisation of funds into a COVID Responsiveness Grant.

The Grant supported universities to implement multimodal teaching and learning plans and campus safety plans. As a Department we are continuing to monitor institutions to keep track of academic and health and safety matters.

I commend all the academic staff and management teams of universities who put in additional efforts to support the necessary changes to the academic year. I also commend the many students in the system who have pushed hard to complete their studies, sometimes in very difficult conditions.

NSFAS beneficiaries continued to receive their funding during the academic year which provides vital support to many students.

Although the available funding at NSFAS is severely constrained, we will continue to provide living allowances to those students who qualify for the period of the extended academic year.

A national framework on tuition and accommodation fees has ensured that additional costs for students have been kept to a minimum.

The Department continues to work with institutions to ensure that additional costs for private accommodation can be kept to a minimum and I would urge that private accommodation providers abide by the principles of this

framework, and that institutions continue to assist students in negotiating with providers where necessary.

I recently received information from all institutions on their plans for the completion of the 2020 academic year in the light on the enhanced Alert Level 3 conditions, and while many institutions have completed the formal teaching programmes for the academic year, some are still finishing academic programmes, and providing catch-up opportunities for students.

In some institutions, assessments and practicals are still to be completed in some programmes, and in others supplementary examinations are underway.

As previously reported, all institutions are following different academic plans, to account for different programme requirements and different conditions.

Ten **(10)** institutions have already completed all teaching and learning activities, including the examinations in 2020, and are just finalising special examinations and in two cases some practical assessments to finalise all aspects.

The remaining sixteen **(16)** institutions are completing the academic year at different times and in different forms, depending on their own academic timetables, and utilising a variety of methods to support students to complete.

[There is an attachment with this statement which contains a table showing different universities and their planned dates for completion of the academic year, including those that have completed]

I therefore urge all our institutions to continue to communicate their detailed programmes with all their stakeholders, particularly with students, prospective students, parents and employees, so that they remain informed at all material times on the roll-out of the institutional programme for proper decision making.

I am confident that with the support of all stakeholders we should successfully complete the academic year by the end of February for the vast majority of institutions and by March for all institutions.

Due to the current lockdown and the need to keep physical distancing and large gatherings at a minimum at many institutions, students who can continue studying from home are being requested to do so. However, many students who have to complete their academic programmes and have difficulty doing so away from campus have returned.

I urge all students and staff to continue staying safe, to keep up with the necessary preventative methods to reduce the spread of the virus, and to abide by the necessary protocols and codes of conduct in place at university campuses and in residences to ensure that they remain safe during this challenging time.

ON THE ENROLMENT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF 2021 PROCESS

I am pleased to say that all institutions have aligned the start of the 2021 Academic Year for first time entries with the availability of Department of Basic Education National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results.

The Department will work closely with institutions in preparing the system for the opening of the 2021 academic year, which, as I have previously reported, will take place between early-March and mid-April this year.

While the current focus is on the completion of the 2020 academic year, I will provide further information on plans for 2021 at a later stage, following engagement with institutions and aligned with the release of the Department of Basic Education National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results.

It will be critical to ensure that the necessary health and safety protocols are in place for the registration period at universities and this will require clear and timeous communication with returning and new students.

One other issue that I would like to address are recent media statements focusing on the UNISA Council's decision to effectively manage its enrolment.

In 2018, with the introduction of the new bursary funding to enable fully subsidised funding for poor and working-class students through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, enrolment planning became extremely

important. This is because the planning and budgeting for NSFAS funding through parliamentary vote is done on the basis of enrolment plans.

Over-enrolment carries the risk of not only collapsing the economy of a single institution, but the entire system, particularly if its scale imposes major financial consequences.

Under-enrolment is also not tenable, as it does not enable South Africa to sufficiently grow the size and diversity of its post-education and training system to meet the needs of our economy and society.

So, recent critical commentary focusing on the UNISA Council's decision to effectively manage its enrolment indicate a lack of understanding of not only the logic of the UNISA decision, but also of how enrolment and available funding is managed in the university education system in South Africa.

I will later issue a detailed statement on this issue.

ON TVET COLLEGES

The approved 2021 Academic Calendar still applies and will be adhered to. Students will return in a staggered manner, on 25 January, the 1st, 8th and 15th February 2021.

Remote learning support will be in place for students who will return in February 2021. The return of trimester students will be prioritized given the

compressed study time for these students, and N5 and N6 students will return before N4 students.

This will allow for walk-ins to be better managed. Presently colleges with the systems in place are continuing with online registrations. For the remainder, colleges have put systems in place to observe all COVID-19 protocols to avert the spread of infections.

Given that colleges and campuses differ quite significantly in the extent to which they are affected by the current rate of infections and fatalities, agreement was reached with the relevant stakeholders on our consultations that colleges will be afforded some flexibility to manage both the return of staff and students, based on the principles and parameters provided by the Department.

This will be especially important for college management to be able to effectively and responsibly manage campuses located in hotspots. The principles outlined above will be communicated to colleges within the next 2-3 days.

ON COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Community Education and Training Colleges completed the 2020 academic year, which culminated in the examination and assessment that ended at the end of November 2020.

Currently the process of marking of the student scripts by all nine provinces is under way.

As advised by the National Coronavirus Council, Cabinet and after consultation with stakeholders, the Minister of Basic Education announced on 15 January 2020 that the reopening of schools has been postponed to 15 February 2021.

To ensure the safe return of staff and students to the centres, and also informed by the DBE's revised academic programme, the CET colleges' 2021 Academic Calendar will change accordingly.

The current 2021 calendar for CET colleges had initially indicated that:

- (a) Lecturers and support staff were to report for duty at their workstations on 25 January 2021;
- (b) New and returning students were to report at the centres on 27 January 2021

However, given the changes in the DBE programme, the CET college programme for 2021 will change accordingly as follows:

- a) The lecturing and support staff will report at their centres on **1 February 2021.**

b) Teaching and learning programme will start on **15 February 2021 for all programmes.**

The management of teaching and learning, deployment of staff as well as the management of the enrolment processes are the responsibilities of the college management, and individual centre managers acting on the directives of the college executive management (Principal and the Deputy Principals).

In order to save lives and to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, college management, staff and students must continue to adhere to the health protocols as provided by the DHET and Higher Health.

Given the changes from DBE, as a Department we will provide the CET colleges with a revised academic calendar after consulting the revisions in the DBE's calendar.

I am happy to announce that the National Treasury has approved **R45,7 million** to be transferred to CET colleges during the 2021/22 financial year as an earmarked allocation for cleaning services. Further details in this regard shall be provided to the CET college management by the Department.

ON THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT BRANCH

The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) have resumed with their activities especially with regards to the workplace-based learning activities, e.g. between the first and second quarter of 2020, learnerships

intake increased from **3 432** to **10 984**; skills programmes from **710** to **5 815**; student placements from **756** to **3 000**.

The envisaged impact with regards to the workplace-based learning programmes, if the adjusted alert level 3 continues for a sustained period, will be the delay in the implementation of the programmes by employers, as they would not wish to commit under the prevailing conditions.

At this point in time there is no clear indication of major negative impact, as most sectors of the economy are operational except the wholesale and retail sector which is affected with regards to the liquor retailers which have been closed, meaning therefore that there is no training taking place there.

Artisan Development: trade testing continues within a limited scope in compliance with the adjusted alert level 3 regulations.

Trade testing commenced on 16 July 2020 testing candidates that were registered prior to the national lockdown. New applications for Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL) and trade test registrations commenced from the 28 September 2020.

To contain the on-site numbers and reduce the risk of contact infections to staff, online applications started for those candidates who have the means to do so and for those who do not have access to the resource for online applications, onsite application is implemented on a principle of prior appointment as to enable control of numbers within registration offices.

National Skills Fund: for the NSF, the lockdown level 3 and applicable regulations allow for all the activities and skills development initiatives undertaken by the NSF through the different skills development providers.

IN CONCLUSION

I know that this has been a challenging time for many students: a time of uncertainty and anxiety for all.

We have been forced into this situation by a global pandemic, and students have had to grapple with self-study, often in difficult circumstances.

I applaud the many students who have adapted to these difficult circumstances, and developed new ways of learning and of coping.

I must also acknowledge that this has been a challenging time for the academic staff of our institutions, who have had to adapt rapidly to new forms of teaching and student support, and who have shown commitment to learning themselves and supporting students, often across multiple different platforms.

I commend this work, as well as the work of institutional managers, administrators and support staff who have worked hard to adapt to the necessary changes.

Let me once-more take this opportunity to express my most sincere appreciation, in particular to the ordinary frontline workers such as security

guards, cleaning and administrative staff, whose crucial role in the fight against the spread of the virus is often not properly recognised. These workers have, and continue to play a very important role in ensuring that as people move about and enter different work and other spaces, they do not spread the virus, or expose themselves and others.

I also thank the staff union leaders and student leaders, who have contributed to planning and support at institutional level. I also thank all the NSI stakeholders who are working tirelessly to ensure that we have a cost effective and effective vaccine. I also thank President Ramaphosa, my colleagues in Cabinet and the entire NCCC.

Thank you

Word Count: 6362