

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINISTER NZIMANDE HOPEFUL OF SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION TO CONSULTATIONS ON 2017 UNIVERSITY FEES, CALLS FOR CONTINUING PATIENCE FROM ALL SIDES

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, says he is hopeful that his current consultations with all stakeholders on 2017 university fees will conclude successfully, with an announcement in this regard expected to be made in mid September this year.

Since the Minister received advice from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) earlier this month, on university fee adjustments for next year, he has been holding necessary consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including university vice-chancellors and council chairs, student leaders and youth organisations, organised labour, faith communities and government officials.

"The purpose of these consultations has been to tap into the collective wisdom of higher education stakeholders in order to find solutions to what is recognised as a societal problem.

"While considering the CHE's advice, we want to ensure that academically capable young people are not denied access to higher education because they come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, while at the same time ensuring that universities are sustained and strengthened.

"We must thus work towards solutions that assist academically deserving young people whose families are struggling to raise sufficient funds to support them at university," Minister Nzimande said.

The government has over the past two decades invested significant resources to assist students who come from poor families through the National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

It is committed to ensuring that this support is strengthened going forward, and that it continues to progressively implement free higher education for the poor as per the current government policy.

Government is also committed to provide better support for middle class students. "The government recognises the burden that working and middle class families bear in supporting their children through basic education and into higher education, and the need to find workable solutions for these groups that are not currently supported through NSFAS.

"And while we look for these solutions, we need to ensure that the principle of social justice is supported and the affluent in our society assist to support those who cannot pay," Minister Nzimande said.

"The biggest problem facing our system is supporting young people from mid-level income families. Currently we do not have a sustainable mechanisms to support these students, and we look forward to the work of the Ministerial Task Team on a Financial Aid Scheme for funding Poor and Missing Middle students at universities and TVET colleges that is chaired by Mr Sizwe Nxasana who is also the chair of NSFAS."

He added that all these issues were being discussed, with stakeholders requesting that the Minister not make any immediate announcements on the issue and that further time be given for stakeholders to discuss all possible solutions to what is a very complex problem being faced by higher education and training and the country at large.

"In the discussions there has been general agreement that sustainable solutions for the higher education system must be found, and any short term decisions need to consider the longer term consequences for the sustainability and strengthening of our public institutions.

"There is also broad agreement that the challenges we face are a societal problem, and the responsibility cannot be shouldered by the government alone. It is a collective responsibility that includes all sectors of society.

"Consultations will therefore continue for another two weeks after which a formal announcement will be made regarding our recommendations on the issue of university fees for 2017. I appeal to students, parents, community leaders, business leaders and all members of society to work with government in this regard," Minister Nzimande said.

Ends.

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