

CALL TO ACTION: MOBILISING CITIZENS TO BUILD A SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Statement by Professor Kader Asmal, Minister of Education,
Tuesday 27 July 1999.

INTRODUCTION

Today I am announcing the start of a national mobilisation for education and training.

At the first Cabinet meeting of the new government, President Thabo Mbeki posed the question: "Is our education system on the road to the 21st century?"

The South African public has a vital interest in the answer.

Today, having consulted virtually the entire leadership corps of the education and training system, I can give him and the nation my reply.

EXPLORING THE TERRAIN

For the past five weeks, I have undertaken a wonderful mission of discovery. I have read dozens of documents. My officials have given me copious briefings. In a week of meetings unprecedented in their intensity and frankness, I have met the leading representatives of every significant national education structure.

They spoke for statutory bodies in education and training, commissions established by our constitution for the protection of democracy, the representative associations of vice-chancellors and principals at all levels, national governing body associations, all national teachers' unions and staff associations, national student bodies representing all levels, leaders in adult education, early childhood development, and education for special needs, organised labour and business.

We talked, we disputed, and we found common ground. Finally, to cap this extraordinary listening campaign, I consulted yesterday with my provincial colleagues in the Council of Education Ministers.

I want to select three salient points from the hundreds of facts, ideas and impressions that the listening campaign has evoked.

We have strong, committed leadership for the 21st century.

Firstly, the leadership of our education and training system in the field embodies remarkable qualities of patriotism, talent, experience, and commitment. The leaders I have met, and the organisations and institutions they represent, have been making heroic unsung contributions to the transformation of our education and training system. I salute them. They are an essential resource for the next phase of our education revolution. What is more, they want to get on with it.

We have excellent policies and laws for the 21st century.

Secondly, I was told by everyone I met that we have created a set of policies and laws in education and training that are at least equal to the best in the world.

In 1994, as we turned our back for good on the divisive and cruel legacy of apartheid, education was considered the most explosive and contentious area of national life. I am proud that our young democratic government, after inclusive and genuine consultation, has built a national consensus around the main education policy positions of the mass democratic movement, while simultaneously re-organising the entire structure of education administration and provision.

The important thing about building consensus for a policy or a law is that people own it and

want to make it work. Implementation takes time, but I have seen convincing evidence that it is happening in all parts of the system, for instance in adult basic education and training, early childhood learning, school curriculum, further education and training, higher education planning, democratic governance, and quality management.

There has been a revolutionary change in South African thinking about education and training. The consensus we have achieved is based squarely on our democratic Constitution, deals squarely with South African realities, and aligns us to respond to the global challenges of the new century.

In crucial respects we are not ready for the 21st century.

Thirdly, the national education leadership is unanimous that our system of education and training has major weaknesses and carries deadly baggage from our past. Large parts of our system are seriously dysfunctional. It will not be an exaggeration to say that there is a crisis at each level of the system.

I will select the worst and most troubling features of our education and training system for special mention: the massive inequalities in access and facilities, the serious state of morale of the teaching force, failures in governance and management, and the poor quality of learning in much of the system.

WHERE WE ARE FAILING

Rampant inequality

Firstly, there is rampant inequality of access to educational opportunities of satisfactory standard. In particular, poor people in all communities, of whom the overwhelming majority are rural Africans, continue to attend decrepit schools, too often without water or sanitation, electricity or telephone, library, workshop or laboratory. Their teachers may never see their supervisors from one year to the next. Their parents remain illiterate, poor and powerless. They are unable to give practical and intellectual support to the educational aspirations of their children.

For such children of democratic South Africa, the promises of the Bill of Rights remain a distant dream. Without a solid foundation of learning, their chances of educational and economic success in later years are dim. So poverty reproduces itself.

Low teacher morale

Secondly, I was told repeatedly that the morale of teachers in all communities is low. This is more complex terrain, because the causes and the incidence may be different in different institutions.

It is obvious that many teachers have been demoralised by the uncertainty and distress of rationalisation and redeployment. Since 1995, protracted consultation, bargaining, legal and labour action, and a lot of sensational rumour mongering have accompanied this process. The cause of equitable and sustainable provision of teachers is just and necessary, but the cost has been high. Teachers have a reasonable expectation of stability and job security, but that has been long in coming.

Another potent reason is the vulnerability of learners and teachers in many schools, colleges and other educational institutions to crimes of trespass, vandalism, carrying and using weapons, drug-dealing, rape, sexual abuse and other forms of physical assault or even murder. Whether committed inside or outside the gates, such outrages create insecurity and fear, and destroy the basis of a learning community.

Indiscipline on the part of principals, teachers and learners was also cited repeatedly as a source of demoralisation among those who want to work and succeed. I was particularly appalled by the repeated observations that too many schools fail to start on time and close

early, that too many learners absent themselves at will, that too many teachers believe that their obligations cease at 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock on a school day.

Many educators at all levels may suffer a more subtle and insidious form of demoralisation if they are not professionally equipped or resourced to cope with the new demands that are being made of them, whether arising from racial integration, or new curricula and pedagogy.

Failures of governance and management

The third disturbing feature to which my attention has been drawn is the serious crisis of leadership, governance, management and administration in many parts of the system. This has many facets. The most serious, in terms of scale, is the incapacity of several provincial departments of education to set the agenda for their systems, perform their tasks in a business-like way, and give adequate professional support to their institutions of learning.

Within institutions, from universities and technikons to small rural schools, such failures have a drastic effect. They open wide the gate to corruption, fraud and indiscipline. They sap the morale of conscientious staff. In the end, they undermine good teaching and learning, which depend on peace, order, stability and professional challenge.

The situation is worsened if governing authorities are ineffective, if they collude with management at the expense of other parties, or if they allow themselves to be subverted by factionalism. In such circumstances, they are unable to fulfil their essential role of good governance and true stewardship of the interests of the institutions they have been appointed to serve. The consequences may be very costly, especially in higher education institutions.

Poor quality of learning

Given the conditions described above, it should not be surprising that the leaders of education with whom I have consulted are intensely concerned about the poor quality of learning in large parts of our system.

The Senior Certificate examination at the end of Grade 12 is the first external check on performance in our school system, and the poor results, especially in six provinces, have shocked the nation. By comparison with other middle-income countries, our learners perform very badly in internationally standardised tests of mathematics and science. School leavers become job-seekers or enter higher education with serious gaps in fundamental knowledge, reasoning skills, and methods of study.

Overwhelmingly, poor learning is associated with poverty, bad or absent facilities, under-prepared teachers, lack of learning resources, and a serious lack of purpose and discipline in many schools, or what is called a culture of learning, teaching and service.

The number of young people who study mathematics with any degree of understanding and proficiency has declined when it should have been increasingly rapidly. As a result, mathematical illiteracy is rife in our society, and the pool of recruits for further and higher education in the information and science-based professions is shrinking, a fact that has grave implications for our national future in the 21st century.

NO TIME TO LOSE

What do I conclude from this rough balance sheet of the assets and liabilities of the education and training system? Despite our success stories, we are failing, especially in those wide-flung tracts of the system that serve poor urban and rural communities. Our new systems of governance, administration and finance have not yet succeeded in hauling these communities out of the arbitrary and unequal education conditions imposed by generations of apartheid and minority rule. In some respects and some areas, the situation has deteriorated.

All modern nations with strong democratic traditions and successful economies have invested heavily in the education and training of their people, in order to ensure access by all citizens to

educational opportunity, and continuously raise the level and quality of learning throughout their societies. Our country has a long way to go, and no time to lose.

A NATIONAL MOBILISATION FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our mandate and duty

The Constitution places a compelling duty on the government to respect, protect, promote and fulfil everyone's right to a basic education, including adult basic education, and to take reasonable measures to make further education progressively available and accessible (section 29).

In June of this year, the people of this country gave the national and provincial governments both a mandate and a responsibility to accelerate the delivery of basic services that will improve their quality of life. The public believes that we have a crisis on our hands. Our people have rights to education that the state is not upholding. They have put their confidence in the democratic process, and returned their government with an overwhelming mandate. After five years of democratic reconstruction and development, the people are entitled to a better education service and they must have it.

We will not fulfil our democratic responsibility, nor will our nation be prepared for the demands of the 21st century, unless we rapidly improve the access of all our people to sound basic education and training in satisfactory facilities, and ensure a fully functioning system of good quality at all levels, from early childhood to university and beyond.

President Mbeki's charge

The President expects that the essential functions of the education system will be carried out efficiently and speedily. As he remarked in his reply to the debate on his State of the Nation address to Parliament, "Teachers must teach. Learners must learn. Managers must manage." That is a fundamentally reasonable expectation, on which all other education success will depend. We will attend to it.

Tirisano

I have concluded, after intensive consultation with representatives of all the main actors in education and training, and the MECs for Education, that the educational condition of the majority of people in this country amounts to a national emergency.

A national emergency requires an exceptional response from the national and provincial governments.

I announce a national mobilisation for education and training, under the slogan "Tirisano", working together. President Mbeki announced the theme of the second democratic government, "A nation at work for a better life for all". That is what we must do in education, together.

The details will be worked out over the coming weeks and months, in consultation with all concerned.

The scope is vast, and even an energetic government cannot attempt everything at once. We will determine priorities, and within those priorities we will set targets.

We will also work with other state departments on the integrated, targeted projects for rural and urban regeneration that President Mbeki called for in his speech, and that are now being planned.

What I am asking for at present is a commitment by citizens and all organs of society to work together with the Ministry of Education and the provincial education authorities to attack the most urgent problems.

National Education Parliament

Once a year, we will summon a National Education Parliament. This will be a true deliberative body of all education stakeholders. Its task will be to reflect on the state of education and training, take stock of our collective progress in attacking the priority areas of need, build solidarity among the main actors in education delivery and the education departments, and point the way forward.

NINE PRIORITIES

Priority 1: We must make our provincial systems work by making co-operative government work

The overall responsibility for the effective management of the education system rests with the Minister of Education, and I intend to fulfil that responsibility. I will do so within the letter and spirit of the Constitution, in particular the provisions relating to co-operative government, the executive authority of the Republic, and the executive authority of provinces.

Under our present arrangements, all education below the higher education level is managed by provincial governments, over which the Minister of Education has only political but not executive authority. I intend to exercise my political authority as Minister of Education as vigorously as is necessary to promote the advancement of the national education and training system.

The management of education systems is a highly complex function of government, and provincial education departments vary considerably in their ability to manage education efficiently. The most serious problems of executive capacity are experienced in the provinces that incorporated former homelands or "independent states". The three largest provinces have the gravest difficulties. They are also the poorest provinces, with the largest backlogs of school buildings and services, and poor communications infrastructure in rural areas.

National education legislation binds provincial governments under certain conditions, and it is important, therefore, to ensure that national Acts, regulations and policies do not impose unreasonable burdens on provincial administrations. Alternatively, provincial departments must be empowered, with the assistance of the national department, to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. National laws and other instruments will be reviewed with this in mind.

There are acute problems with the allocation and management of many provincial education budgets. The Minister of Education has some leverage on these matters through the budget process under the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, although this is largely indirect. I intend to take responsibility, with the Minister of Finance, for collaborative work on provincial education budgets, together with provincial MECs, and MECs for Economic Affairs and Finance.

It is vital to improve the ratio of non-personnel to personnel funding. The good work being undertaken to cut waste and fraud and improve efficiency in provincial systems has my emphatic support. However, it is imperative that provincial governments allocate sufficient funds for the essential personnel and non-personnel needs of provincial education systems, and that such allocations are not tampered with during the course of the financial year.

The national Department of Education, using its ordinary budget, dedicated state grants, and external support, assists its provincial counterparts through direct administrative and professional support. I will review what is currently happening under the technical assistance programmes, in order to ensure that they are well targetted and effective, and to explore whether they could be expanded.

The Minister of Education has powers, under the National Education Policy Act, 1996, to monitor the performance of provincial education authorities in meeting their constitutional obligations and in implementing national policy. The Minister must report breaches to Parliament, as well as remedial action that is jointly planned by the provincial and national education departments. This formal power to monitor and report will be used whenever appropriate, especially when there appears to have been serious failure by provinces to meet their obligations.

However, I will employ a faster and less formal method of monitoring and advice, by requiring all senior officials of the Department of Education and my own advisers to spend a certain amount of their time on visits to provincial education departments and institutions. Such visits, on which each officer concerned must report, will also serve as a means to cross-check whether or not national law or policy needs to be reviewed or changed.

In addition, I will report to the President every three months on the progress in provincial education, according to a set of indicators that will be discussed with the Council of Education Ministers (CEM). Such reports will be sent to Premiers and the press.

Priority 2: We must break the back of illiteracy among adults and youths in five years

No adult South African citizen should be illiterate in the 21st century, but millions will be unless we mobilise a social movement to bring reading, writing and numeracy to those who do not have it. At present, millions of South African adults and young people cannot read or write in any language, and millions more are functionally illiterate and innumerate, that is they cannot put their reading and writing skills to any useful purpose, and cannot manipulate numerical concepts.

In modern society illiteracy excludes people from avenues of learning and communication, improved job skills and many normal responsibilities of citizenship. It is an alienating and disempowering thing, and increases dependence on others. For these reasons, many adults who are illiterate and innumerate are ashamed of their condition, and try to hide it.

Literacy is not an easy skill to retain. It can be lost or rendered ineffective through disuse. Our new Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Programme transcends literacy. It targets learning outcomes that empower, rather than leading to a dead end. Its learning programmes give qualifications that carry credit in the National Qualifications Framework. This enables adult learners to proceed with formal education, by self-study or otherwise. The Multi-Year Implementation Plan for ABET will enable close to a million new learners to achieve the equivalent of Grade 9 by 2003, provided the funds can be found and ABET practitioners trained.

We must support this programme as much as possible. Unfortunately, budgetary pressure has resulted in several provincial education departments cutting back or closing ABET programmes when they should have been expanding. This trend ought to be reversed, but it is improbable that the government will find sufficient additional funds in the near future to eliminate illiteracy through formal ABET programmes run by provincial education departments.

Another strategy is needed.

Firstly, all employers, including employers in national, provincial and local governments, must be encouraged to run or support ABET programmes for their employees. Many do so already, and some are leaders in ABET provision. But a major opportunity opens up through the introduction of the skills levy, and the establishment of Sector Education and Training Authorities under the National Skills Authority. I will consult the Minister of Labour with a view to ensuring that we target a massive increase in ABET provision through this route. Illiterate citizens who are not in employment would also have access to ABET programmes through the National Skills Fund.

Secondly, we must stimulate the civic virtue of voluntary service, in support of our illiterate compatriots. I extend an open invitation to all religious, political, social, educational and community formations to help us design a major programme of voluntary service on behalf of literacy and numeracy, and make facilities available to run it. Students, especially in secondary schools, further education and training institutions and higher education, will have a brilliant opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to community service by becoming literacy practitioners. My Ministry will be consulting on this matter with the National Youth Commission.

Even voluntary service requires funds to meet overhead and other costs. Given the scale of the need, such funds might be considerable. Once the programme has been planned and costed, I

will appeal to national and international grant-making agencies to assist. The National Development Agency should have a strategic role in providing support to participating NGOs.

Priority 3: Schools must become centres of community life

The crisis in primary and secondary schools must be dealt with by ensuring that schools become the centres of community life.

The school will truly become a centre of community and cultural life if its facilities are being put to use for youth and adult learning, community meetings, music and drama, sports and recreation. An idle school is a vulnerable place, inviting vandalism. A busy school is a place the community will protect, because it is theirs. There is a role in a community school for religious bodies, businesses, cultural groups, sports clubs and civic associations, both to serve their own requirements and to contribute to the school's learning programme both in and out of school hours.

The school governing body, led by parents, exercises a trust on behalf of the parents of the community, and functions as the indispensable link between the school and the community. It must not be forgotten that this is a new concept for most communities in the country. We must therefore put great effort into ensuring that governing bodies, especially in poor communities, are given the support they need to become strong and viable. The Ministry of Education has an interest in ensuring that all public school governing bodies become members of governing body associations, which can represent them in dealing with the education authorities, and provide valuable technical support to their members. We will assist bona fide established or new governing body associations to access funds to support their organisational costs and outreach work.

The school principal, who represents the provincial department of education and is head of the school management team, has the crucial role of professional and administrative leadership, and is responsible for the standard of learning and teaching in the school. The principal needs to forge a working partnership with the governing body, so that they can jointly serve the vision and mission of the school in the community. Both parties require guidance in exercising their respective roles. It is therefore important that the school leadership team, headed by the principal, and the governing body in each public school, is given the opportunity to create the sense of common purpose and mutual support.

A functioning school is a true community in its own right, and an indispensable centre for the wider community's social and cultural needs and interests. But for this to happen, we need peace and stability in schools and in the environment of schools. Schools must therefore be rendered safe for learners, teachers, staff and the public. There must be regulations to restrict access only to those who have legitimate business in the school. Schools need to forge links with police stations, and join Community Policing Forums.

Public schools must be reclaimed from those who are violent in word or deed. Only in conditions of peace can discipline flourish. The law and order approach may bring about pacification, but it will not bring peace. Peace must be internally generated. In a society that is prone to violence, the peaceful settlement of disputes must be taught, and acted out in the society of the school. Values, morality and decency must be reinstated as the bedrock of school life, and self-discipline as the basis of disciplinary codes in the school. Corporal punishment is contrary to the Constitution and the South African Schools Act. In the past it has contributed to the culture of violence in our society. Parents, teachers and learners need help to understand why it has been prohibited, and to work out more effective substitutes.

Discipline in a community school will require that teaching starts on the first day of term. School must start on time and end on time, from Monday to Friday every week of the school year.

It would be incompatible with the notion of "community", as well as a denial of basic rights, if public schools ignored their responsibility to children with special needs, and their parents. Public schools should be, by definition, inclusive, humane and tolerant communities. The Ministry's long-awaited policy on education for learners with special needs will shortly be ready

for publication. Schools must be assisted to create an enabling environment for parents whose children have physical disabilities or other special needs, so that early identification can result in appropriate advice and placement. To the greatest extent compatible with the interests of such children, the ordinary public school in the community should welcome them and provide for them.

A mobilisation in support of the community school idea will give a boost to the Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service (COLTS) campaign, whole school development programmes, and a new programme launched by President Mbeki to forge partnerships for school improvement with poorly functioning but well-motivated public schools.

Priority 4: We must end conditions of physical degradation in South African schools

Although the government has contributed more than R1 billion to the National School Building Programme, it may require twelve times that amount to meet the backlogs identified in the School Register of Needs. This is well beyond the reach of the normal budgets of provincial education departments, which in recent years have suffered sharp decreases in the funds allocated to school building and services.

Nevertheless, millions of school children in democratic South Africa are required by circumstances to exercise their fundamental right to basic education in conditions of squalor and degradation. Thousands of schools have poor physical fabric, and many are dangerous and unfit for human habitation. Hundreds of schools have no water on site, no sanitation whatsoever, or rudimentary and insufficient toilets. Such conditions threaten the health of learners and teachers alike, and radically restrict the social and teaching activities of the school. It is impossible to contemplate this with complacency. The situation cries out for remedy.

I will use every opportunity to press the priority of public spending on replacing dangerous and dilapidated schools, and providing water and sanitation services where they do not exist. It will be necessary to prioritise and target the areas and schools where the need is greatest, working with the provincial education departments. This could be a major project under the new Integrated Rural Development Programme announced by President Mbeki, working in partnership with other state departments, provincial authorities, parastatals and NGOs. Bringing water and sanitation in schools offers scope for a labour-intensive, community-based project. My Department has begun the initial planning work.

Priority 5: We must develop the professional quality of our teaching force

All the evidence provided to me indicates that there is a real malaise in the teaching corps of this country, notwithstanding the high levels of professional service which teachers provide in schools all over the land.

The provision of teachers in schools under apartheid resulted in two serious social distortions. One was the extreme inequality in learner-educator ratios that were sustained by unequal budget allocations based on racial and ethnic discrimination. It is bitterly unfortunate that teachers have borne the brunt of a process of rationalisation that, for the first time, allocates teachers equitably to schools according to curriculum needs. However, there is every prospect of job security for all qualified and registered teachers who are currently employed, and a return to stable staffing in our schools.

The second serious distortion was the racially-defined qualification structure, linked to racially-defined opportunities for training, which ensured that African teachers, taken as a whole, are less well qualified than other teachers. These less qualified teachers also teach, predominantly, in schools with poor facilities, inadequate learning resources, greater isolation from urban centres, and infrequent or no professional support services.

Professional development for teachers, combined with effective professional support services, the efficient provision of learning support materials, a mobilisation campaign to make the school the centre of community life, and the progressive elimination of inhuman physical conditions in schools, will make a major impact on teachers' morale and the quality of the service they

render.

The Ministry of Education will give top priority to develop and implement a long-range plan for teacher development, both pre-service and in-service, in support of outcomes based education and improved standards of teaching. President Mbeki put this at the head of his list of government commitments in education. Special attention will need to be given to the compelling evidence that the country has a critical shortage of mathematics, science and language teachers, and to the demands of the new information and communication technologies.

In order to recognise outstanding teachers at all levels of the system, I will establish a National Teacher Award scheme, after consultation with the South African Council for Educators, the national teacher unions, and the provincial education departments.

I will also give priority to the preparation of a green paper on professional standards in education, as part of the process of enabling the South African Council for Educators to take its full place as a statutory professional body with real influence on the quality of service provision.

All these measures will help to realign the identity of the teacher in South African society. The years of discrimination, repression, struggle, and democratic transition have taken their toll, on teachers in all communities. It is time to re-assert the dignity of the teaching profession, because teachers at their best are vital agents of change and growth in our schools and communities.

Priority 6: We must ensure the success of active learning through outcomes-based education

The government and the Minister of Education give complete support to the new national curriculum framework based on the concept of outcomes based education. Curriculum 2005 represents our best hope of transforming the retrograde inheritance of apartheid-era learning theories and obsolete teaching practices.

It is important to recognise what damage was done over the decades by an approach to education that was essentially authoritarian and allowed little or no room for the development of critical capacity or the power of independent thought and enquiry. Outcomes based education is an approach that embraces the capacity of learners to think for themselves, to learn from the environment, and to respond to wise guidance by teachers who value creativity and self-motivated learning.

While giving unreserved support to the approach, the Ministry of Education will resist over-zealous attempts from any quarter to convert OBE into a new orthodoxy with scriptural authority. There will be no mystification of an approach to learning and teaching that is essentially liberatory and creative.

I have directed that the Department of Education undertake a speedy review of the implementation of outcomes based education, with a view to the phasing of the introduction of new grades.

I have also established as a target performance indicator that all children will achieve competence in reading, writing and numeracy skills by age 9, or the end of Grade 3. The Department of Education will take advice on the appropriate formulation of this standard and the manner of its implementation. It is essential to put in place a strong scaffolding for the new curriculum framework. The Department is working on appropriate key tests of learning attainment at grades 6 and 9.

It is fully recognised that the success of the implementation of the new approach is entirely dependent on the extent to which teachers are properly prepared to facilitate it with understanding, and the extent to which appropriate learning support materials are in the schools.

It was unfortunate in the extreme that the inaugural year of Curriculum 2005 (1998) coincided with the crisis in provincial budget management, with the result that the preparation of most provincial education departments was seriously compromised, or even disrupted. In both 1998 and 1999, new materials in support of the curriculum reached the schools late in the year, despite President Mandela's directive.

The specification, ordering, delivery and retention of learning support materials is a critical factor in the current crisis of school education, for which urgent solutions will be found. A business review of the entire process in all nine provinces is nearing completion. I have directed that the results are made known to both the Minister of Finance and myself, so that effective follow-up can be considered with the least possible delay. The target that all schools must receive their materials before the first day of school is not negotiable. We will find the way to ensure that provincial education departments are empowered to make it happen.

It is important to ensure that the large sums that are needed for learning support materials each year are wisely spent and represent the kind of value for money that is appropriate to our circumstances as a middle-income country with a majority of poor citizens. I have therefore directed that a study be undertaken of the costs of producing learning support materials, after consultation with the publishers and suppliers.

The retention of books in schools is a vital ingredient in keeping costs down and keeping learning up. All parents, principals and governing bodies must be made aware of their responsibilities to ensure that this aspect of discipline is strongly enforced, with appropriate sanctions. I commend the Congress of South African Students for launching Operation Mazibuye, which aims to use advocacy and persuasion at school and community level to achieve the same result, both for school books and other school property that may have been removed from schools. This campaign deserves total support.

Priority 7: We must create a vibrant further education and training system to equip youth and adults to meet the social and economic needs of the 21st century

Further education and training (FET), as the name implies, is the post-compulsory sector that precedes higher education. It includes education in senior secondary schools, technical colleges, community colleges and youth colleges, and much training at this level by employers within commerce and industry. Private providers are highly active in this field, and will be subject to regulation under the Further Education and Training Act, 1998.

As a bridge between general education and higher education or employment, this is a vital sector for young people and adults whose formal education has been cut short. The policy has been settled and the legislation is in place. We must now get on with implementation, in close co-operation with the Department of Labour and the South African Qualifications Authority, since the establishment of the Sector Education and Training Authorities opens up exciting opportunities for further education and training institutions.

There is an urgent need to review all FET programmes in the light of community social and economic needs in the 21st century. Language programmes, mathematics and science, and information and communication technologies are priority areas for review.

It is essential for the FET sector to be as accessible as possible to adult learners who were unable to continue their education because of poverty or lack of opportunity. The sector must set itself the goal of becoming leading practitioners in the assessment and recognition of prior learning, gained informally or through experience, so that able and experienced adults may be admitted to programmes from which they could benefit.

Work on the replacement of the Senior Certificate examination by a Further Education and Training Certificate will be taken forward with all necessary speed. In the mean time, it is essential for fail-safe mechanisms to be put in place to guarantee the security of the present Senior Certificate examination process, and avoid the slightest possibility of criminal manipulation of the marks by anyone. The South African Certification Council (SAFCERT) has been directed to certify the results independently before they are announced to the public by

provincial examination authorities. I will introduce amending legislation in Parliament this year to clarify the responsibilities of this important statutory body and ensure that in future there is no uncertainty about its role.

Priority 8: We must implement a rational, seamless higher education system that grasps the intellectual and professional challenges facing South Africans in the 21st century

The country depends on the higher education system to meet its high level human resource needs and to be the engine for the creation of new knowledge and innovation, and critical discourse. Given the magnitude of our other priorities, it is unlikely that significant additional resources will be available for higher education, which already receives 14 per cent of the education budget, a proportion well in line with international spending in this area.

It is important, however, that funding levels to the sector are sustained, while institutions become more efficient and accountable for the utilisation of their intellectual, infrastructural and financial resources.

Like schools, our universities, technikons and colleges must become vibrant centres of community and cultural life.

They must provide a safe and secure environment conducive to promoting their mission of teaching and learning, scholarship and research, and community service. Violence of any sort and especially violence against women will not be tolerated. University and technikon residences must be reclaimed as safe learning and living spaces, particularly for women students.

I am very pleased to report that the student leadership in higher education, across a wide political spectrum, have committed themselves to peace and stability in the sector.

I expect higher education managers to run their institutions in a responsible and inclusive manner, which means engaging in good faith consultation with SRCs and staff associations. Provided that they do so, I expect student and staff bodies to exhaust all local remedies on their own campuses before contemplating an appeal to the Minister.

Similarly, I will expect institutional councils to account for their legal and fiduciary responsibilities. I take seriously the responsibility to nominate certain members on each institutional council. I will be reviewing the appointment and performance of such Ministerial nominees, from whom I expect a report on their contribution to good governance in these institutions.

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system, responsive to the needs of students of all ages and the intellectual challenges of the 21st century.

The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners. As our policy documents make clear, it is vital that the mission and location of higher education institutions be re-examined with reference to both the strategic plan for the sector, and the educational needs of local communities and the nation at large in the 21st century.

This complex and difficult exercise is likely to result in mergers between some institutions, and decisions to change the missions of others. It is well known that institutions find it very difficult to come to such decisions on their own. Provided the investigation has been thorough and consultation has been undertaken fully and in good faith, I will not hesitate to take the necessary action with all deliberate speed.

I am committed to the wise and full development of the public higher education system. I will not be party to inadvertent damage to this system, or to public interests, brought about by an

unduly generous interpretation of the regulations for the registration of private higher education institutions. The proliferation of such institutions, both local and trans-national, has become part of the unfolding South African higher education landscape, as it has in other countries. This must now be brought under strict but considered regulation, consistent with the Constitution. I will undertake an urgent review of the criteria and procedures for registration in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997. I will also seek international advice on the management of the private, corporate and "borderless" higher education phenomenon, and its relationship to strategic human resource development planning

Enrolments in public higher education institutions have declined in the past few years. The reasons need to be better understood. The long-term sustainability of individual institutions and the system as a whole requires that growth be promoted in a planned and responsible manner. As part of the ongoing planning process, I will be asking all universities and technikons to inform me of their intake targets for the year 2000 and the recruitment strategies for attaining these targets. These must include a commitment to the recruitment of mature age learners, and the application of procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

While the student composition of higher education institutions has changed significantly over the past few years to better reflect the demographic realities of the broader society, the same cannot be said for the composition of the academic staff in higher education, which largely remains white and male. I will be giving close attention to promoting greater staff equity in the system through an investigation of staff conditions of employment and related matters. Institutions must be challenged to set targets to progressively achieve greater representation of women and black academic staff, as part of their institutional plans.

The higher education system will also be called upon to play a central role in the building of capacity for the education system as a whole. In particular its resources must be mobilised to support quality pre-service and in-service teacher education and educational management capacity building. Our faculties and schools of education have an exceptional opportunity to inform educational policy and practice throughout the education system through research, critical reflection and innovation.

I am committed to building a responsive higher education system of high quality. We have much to do. I will ask universities, technikons and colleges to provide me with evidence to show that they are indeed on the road to the 21st century.

Priority 9: We must deal urgently and purposefully with the HIV/AIDS emergency in and through the education and training system

This is the priority that underlies all priorities, for unless we succeed, we face a future full of suffering and loss, with untold consequences for our communities and the education institutions that serve them.

The Ministry of Education will work alongside the Ministry of Health to ensure that the national education system plays its part to stem the epidemic, and to ensure that the rights of all persons infected with the HIV virus are fully protected.