**Memorandum from the Parliamentary Office**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 240**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 24/02/2017**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 04 OF 2017)**

**Ms D Carter (Cope) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:**

(1) In light of the prohibitive costs of higher education, is he aware of any initiative to address the high cost of prescribed textbooks;

(2) is he prepared to engage with institutions of higher learning and the publishing industry to address the specified matter; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

**NW253E**

**REPLY:**

(1) The Department does not prescribe specific student textbooks per subject in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as this is not a suitable model to use in a post-school vocational learning environment.

Students in TVET colleges do not pay for their textbooks. It is a requirement that colleges must provide every student with a minimum of one textbook per subject per level until the student has passed the subject. This is funded through the Voted Funds transferred to colleges. This principle applies to all the Ministerially-funded programmes and qualifications offered in TVET colleges.

I am aware of the high cost of knowledge resources (including prescribed textbooks, academic books, journals and e-journals and databases) relating to university education. While there is no specific initiative to deal with prescribed textbooks on their own, there have been two related initiatives linked to the issue of creating efficiencies and bringing down the costs of such resources. These are:

1. engagements with National Treasury and the South African Revenue Service around the issue of Value Added Tax and other taxes on knowledge resources; and
2. a process for enabling national negotiations with publishers on e-resources (initially e-journals and databases) with the long-term aim of to enable the establishment of a national digital library, including e-text books.

(2) The Department has an ongoing relationship with all publishers of student textbooks, actively involved in the college market, since 2006. Regular written and oral communication takes place between the relevant branch of the Department and related publishers in the form of correspondence and meetings to address specific needs and requirements for student textbooks.

TVET colleges have access to lists and prices of textbooks available in the sector and subject committees in these institutions select textbooks based on set criteria.

Most colleges procure student textbooks directly from publishers, to reduce the knock-on cost along the distribution value chain, although booksellers sometimes play an important role to relieve the burden on colleges to procure a wide variety of student textbooks needed for a range of programmes being offered in these institutions.

No significant annual increase in prices of student textbooks happened since 2006. In some instances, the increase has been as little as R5 per textbook costing in the region of R200. In 2016, one publisher dropped their prices as a result of healthy competition amongst publishers in a relatively small market compared to the schools market.

To date colleges have not complained about the cost of textbooks. Currently, what could pose a problem is the over-enrolment of students in colleges, which may lead to cash flow challenges resulting in institutions avoiding purchasing new textbooks for all students. The Department is aware of such challenges and is currently dealing with these as urgent cases and attention is given for immediate resolution.

I am prepared to engage with universities and the publishing industry. The Department, in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) has started this process through a focus on national site licenses for e-journals and databases which are prohibitively expensive and are not accessible to all universities and their students. Currently, universities and science councils purchase individual licenses to access electronic databases, with many not being in a position to afford the associated fees to enable an effective range of resources to support high level teaching, learning and research. Between 2014 and 2016, the Department commissioned the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) to investigate and assist with evaluating options for implementing national site licenses for access to electronic journals and databases. The investigation, which was jointly overseen by the Department and DST, has recently been concluded. The investigation suggests that the establishment of national site licenses, through a high level national negotiating team, would bring about substantial savings, while at the same time improve equity of access to e-journals and databases across the university and science sectors. A process for taking this work forward is currently being worked on.

COMPILER/CONTACT PERSONS:

EXT:

DIRECTOR – GENERAL

STATUS:

DATE:

QUESTION 240 APPROVED/NOT APPROVED/AMENDED

Dr BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

STATUS:

DATE: