**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**Thursday, 12 MAY**

***MINI PLENARIES (VIRTUAL)* 14:00**

**(1) Vote 17: Higher Education and Training**

**BUDGET VOTE: 17**

**Hon. S L Ngcobo, MP (on behalf of Hon. S. Sanele Zondo, MP)**

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Honourable Speaker,

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) must be commended for its sterling work in truly delivering transformation in the higher education sector. It is one of the only departments that have managed to ensure that targets have been met regarding the National Development Plan.

While these milestones are commendable, far too many young people and their families are standing in queues and anxiously awaiting feedback from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) on whether students can register, study, and be accommodated on campuses.

It cannot be that students are held to ransom and do not receive their transcripts, due to the inability of the NSFAS to make pay-outs. We cannot allow this entity to falter when it is responsible for billions of Rands in aid funds.

This house and all South Africans are well aware that when corruption rears its ugly head, it destroys the good intentions for which funds are meant: to be disseminated to students and to support families who live below the required income threshold.

Speaker, the IFP would like to support the Committee's recommendations regarding the myriad of issues raised, to ensure that we get the DHET back on track, and to get students back in classes and on the road to recovery from the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the sector.

Under the Department's current leadership, we are pleased with the progress made in ensuring that vacancies are filled, yet more can be done to make sure that all targets are reached.

With the highest unemployment rate in the country and the highest number of young people out of jobs, we must ensure that we do right in this Department to sharpen our focus and ensure that critical skills and shortages are addressed adequately.

Honourable Speaker, it is imperative that this Department and all its line function entities are supported, while oversight is increased from the Portfolio Committee’s side, to hold all stakeholders to account.

The lack of consequence management for those who step out of line is a matter that requires urgent intervention.

A very stern and clear message must be sent to all officials who are party to bungling the financial processes of this Department and its entities.

That tough message must read something along the lines of: "shape up, or get out!"

The IFP supports the Budget.

I thank you.