

Hon NT Mkhathshwa, MP  
Chairperson: Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science, and Innovation  
National Assembly  
Parliament  
CAPE TOWN  
8000

27 November 2023

Dear Ms Mkhathshwa

**RE: REQUEST FOR WRITTEN RESPONSE BY PSA ON READINESS FOR 2024-ACADEMIC YEAR**

At the onset, the PSA wishes all matriculants well in their future endeavours and trusts that their dedication will pay off. The PSA hopes that the pass rate and quality of results will prepare matriculants for post-school education. It is further trusted that matriculants will take the opportunity to utilise programmes and academic courses offered by higher education and training institutions to prepare them for their chosen careers. The PSA urges matriculants to register on time, submit relevant documentation, and utilise the various pathways to subscribe to opportunities for training, learnership, and internship.

Many criminal activities were unfortunately reported at various higher learning institutions during the year. The PSA urges the Department to put stringent measures in place in 2024 to prevent criminal activities at institutions of learning, especially related to gender-based violence against young women. It is of paramount importance that the Department allocates more resources to protect vulnerable students and employees. The Department must further increase awareness campaigns about violence against young women. Wellness programmes should be improved by allocating more resources. Security at institution premises must also be improved, with security companies being vetted for proper control.

The PSA urges the Department to put measures in place to limit hardships experienced by students owing to loadshedding. The Department must invest in solar solutions to ensure that teaching and learning are not disrupted.

Enrolment of new students must be streamlined by the Department. The student to lecturer ratio must be balanced. Strike action and protests occur annually owing to the lack of access to institutions of learning. Most aspiring students complain that they are excluded from advancing their future. Enrolment at the beginning of the year further disrupts the education system and measures must be in place to prevent this situation.

The allocation and administration of financial assistance through NSFAS remain a challenge for the Department. Previously disadvantaged students are excluded from financial support owing to administrative challenges. The Department must ensure that such disruption is minimised for a smooth start to the 2024-academic year. Accommodation for first-year students at universities and TVET colleges also remain a major concern. Every year the country witnesses students sleeping on floors of institutions. This situation must be avoided at all costs by means of proper planning.

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The PSA urges the Department to prioritise improvement and development of infrastructure at various institutions of learning. There should be full compliance with occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations. The poor condition of most TVET and CET institutions is disturbing. The Department must comply with OHS provisions, especially at TVET colleges in township and rural areas. OHS committees must be established at all such institutions.

The PSA has observed that the phasing out of the N1-N3 engineering TVET programme will leave most lecturers redundant. Most of them were not re-skilled or developed to teach other learning programmes. The Department is requested not to retrench these employees but to improve their capacity and utilise them in other faculties. The Department should allocate bursaries to lectures to improve their qualifications, aligned with technological innovations. Skills development programmes must be introduced. The Department must develop strategies to enhance lecturers' skills to achieve a qualified, skilled, and capable workforce. The capacitation of TVET and CET lecturers is of utmost importance. Advocacy programmes for lectures must produce accredited certifications and 4IR programmes must be introduced at all higher learning institutions. Lecturers' salary scales must be standardised at all higher education institutions. CET lecturers are poorly paid, and this must receive urgent attention. Contract lecturers must be absorbed at all institutions to maintain the quality of education and balance the lecturer to student ratio. Hours of work must be increased to 40 hours per week. The Department must build infrastructure for the CET sector as it uses basic education resources. Budget allocation for the higher education and training sector must be increased to maintain the quality of education at this level.

Institutions must achieve the National Development Plan goals to enrol more than 1.6 million students in 2030. The Department must consider increasing the number of universities and TVET colleges to accommodate this envisaged number of students in 2030.

The Department must further align with global trends in education. It must embrace digitisation and climate change. Continuous digital disruption by loadshedding and the fast-changing nature of jobs have fundamental roles to change the world of work. There is a need for new skills to deal with such changes. It requires a shift from a traditional lecturer-centred approach, which is content-driven and based on theory alone. Lecturers must be deliverers of quality knowledge. It is thus imperative for the Department to invest in lecturers for students' future.

SETAs and the National Skills Fund should also play a critical role in improving the capacity of students and lectures by creating opportunities for lecturers' skills development. The Department must allow lecturers to be placed at industries for at least a week during holidays to improve their skills and knowledge, which will be transferred to students. The Department must further invest in post-graduate funding to allow students to conduct research in support of improving the country's economy and preventing natural disasters such as floods and global warming. The private sector should actively assist to allocate resources towards such programmes.

The Department must further strengthen ties between higher education institutions and the labour market to create a local labour-market environment. It must encourage partnership with global and international institutions to improve the standard of education. Global collaboration will improve management, governance, quality assurance, innovation, and internalisation. Exchange programmes with first-world countries must be implemented. Employees must be exposed to labour markets and teaching methods to bridge gap between South Africa and the rest of the world.

The PSA urges the Department to encourage stakeholder partnership with various organisations, such as trade unions, to maintain labour peace at institutions to allow employees to perform their duties without disturbance.

The PSA, as one of the major trade unions in the Department of Higher Education and Training, will continue to participate in efforts to support the growth of the sector. The Union of Choice is looking forward to a successful 2024-academic year.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a vertical stroke, enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

R M Maleka

**GENERAL MANAGER**