

## **Budget Debate on Vote 17: Higher Education and Training**

**Speech by Chantel King MP**

**DA Shadow Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation**

Minister Nzimande's attendance at committee meetings is woefully inadequate, to say the least. Instead of the Higher Education Minister briefing us, Ministers Ndabeni and Nxesi stand in for the Minister as per his request. These are the actions of internal petty squabbles between the Minister and his Deputy that screams erosion of trust not only between them but in the PSET sector as a whole.

How do we hold the executive accountable when this Minister cannot fulfil his role and mandate as accounting officer for the post-school and education sector?

We have a PSET sector under siege.

Students are angry, their institutions turned into a battlefield. They were sold a dream of free education for all.

I met with students who expressed their anxiety about NSFAS funding outcome delays, scared if they will be allowed to write exams.

These students are not playing to the gallery or grandstanding – they are expressing their anguish, frustration and anger of being sold a dream.

They are losing hope and going hungry while waiting on funding outcomes from NSFAS. They are still waiting on appeal outcomes, some spanning back from 2022.

They are waiting for answers on the 40 credits that are excluding them from accommodation.

Just a few weeks ago NSFAS deliberately did not honour a longstanding commitment with the committee and on postponing this meeting they had the audacity to present to us a half-cooked report on their performance thus far. Clearly, the board of NSFAS is not taking the oversight role of the committee seriously as well as that of the Auditor-General when submitting their strategic plans and annual performance plans after the due date.

A rogue entity being a law unto themselves who's playing ping-pong with the lives of poor and working-class students. This entity who claims to have distributed 96.6% of student funding and yet we saw students at CPUT, UWC and NMU taking to the streets – what a contradiction.

Our oversight visit to the University of Fort Hare was warning signs of political allegiance posing a threat to institutional autonomy. We were met by the brave VC, Dr Buhlungu, his Deputies and the university spokesperson. They were concerned that a once proud institution is being infiltrated by a syndicate of politicians and officials of the university.

They are concerned that a university is being captured and this syndicate is trying everything in their power to intimidate and victimize them for standing up to corruption at the institution.

A glimmer of hope is that the SIU investigations will shed light on Mayor Faku, Minister Kiviet and Premier Mabuyane's qualifications, as well as the deep-rooted political infiltration of ANC politicians at the UFH. Minister, we will expect you to be the first one to stand up and tell these charlatans to step aside. It will be a true test of your integrity.

Of the almost 13 million applications for the social relief of distress grant at the end of January this year, 716 000 tertiary graduates applied.

I am bringing this to your attention, Minister. Just consider for one moment:

- How fundamentally different their career prospects would have been if TVET colleges and institutions of higher learning curricula were in line with trends in the job market;
- If it took less than 6 months for SETA and QCTO to issue certificates;
- If some of these missing middle students had the means to clear their student debt to have access to their certificate to look for employment;
- They could be students who were victims of unaccredited courses at WSU or just victims of the impact of load-shedding when their place of employment or businesses had to close – their dream of entrepreneurship folded.

Underfunded entities, inconsistent and poor governance in the PSET sector has a cascading impact on the lives of students, academia and the mandate of institutions, even more, so the behaviours of the VCs of UCT and Unisa take the transformational agenda of senior black female academics a step back.

Minister, just because you are doing a lot more does not mean you getting a lot more done. Don't confuse movement with progress. If the basic fundamental principles of oversight, transparency and accountability are not in place, then you are certainly planning for failure. The reports from your department scream of systems and process failures

Policy direction and implementation have never been and never will be the ANC's strong point.

Our governance in the Western Cape, uMngeni and Kouga shows policy direction easily translated into the lived reality of employment opportunities through upskilling and reskilling young and old.

Time is too precious and limited to waste it living under the ANC's dream, we will not be trapped by dogma.

Our tenure in office after the 2024 moonshot elections will give public and private education a fighting chance to create a knowledge economy driving innovation at the centre of social and economic growth.

We remain clear: No one will be left behind.