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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1192**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 7/05/2021**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 12 OF 2021**

**Mr M N Nxumalo (IFP) to ask to the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

(1) With reference to the budget cuts for all government departments in the 2020‑21 financial year, including the Department of Higher Education and Training, what is the long-term plan of his department regarding (a) students’ historic debt and (b) safeguarding the integrity and financial sustainability of universities, given the billions owed to the institutions by students and the ongoing cuts on research and funding for universities experienced recently;

(2) whether he is undertaking any consultations with other stakeholders and affected students regarding his department’s processes of addressing the plight of university students falling into the missing middle; if not, why not; if so, who is being consulted in making a holistic decision in addressing this issue? **NW1383E**

**REPLY:**

(1) In March 2021, the Department requested universities to complete a student debt survey template with the aim of providing the best possible data on the total student debt as at 30 December 2020. This work will feed into the review requested by Cabinet on government policy in relation to student financial aid, including the “missing middle” and the sustainability of institutional funding (block grants, earmarked and infrastructure funding).

(2) The Minister will appoint a task team to review the sustainability of and options for the post-school education and training student financial aid system. The focus of the review will be on the sustainable modelling of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), as well as to explore a different public-private sector mechanism to enable better support for the “missing middle” income bracket. Once concluded this will be tabled for Cabinet’s consideration.