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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1233**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 14/05/2021**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 13 OF 2021**

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

Given the possibility of a third wave of COVID-19 in the coming months, how has his department prepared to balance the 2021 academic year and safety of students? **NW1424E**

**REPLY:**

The Minister released directions in the Government Gazette No. 44342, dated 29 March 2021 (attached) to guide public and private higher education institutions for the 2021 academic year.

The directions provide high-level guidance through a national framework and criteria to all institutions in managing operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work builds on previous guidance provided in 2020 during the initial lockdown period and over the period that students and staff returned to campus as part of a phased-in approach. It is anticipated that the directions will be utilised by institutions during the academic year, in conjunction with any relevant directions issued as part of the national state of disaster.

In terms of the directions, institutions must maintain institutional plans for the effective management of operations during the pandemic and have in place a COVID-19 response Task Team. Each public higher education institution has also developed a teaching and learning plan, which considers the different circumstances that may arise during the pandemic, drawing on lessons from the 2020 academic year.

In addition, the Department is supported by Higher Health, which works closely with all public post-school institutions to provide guidelines and advice on the management of teaching and learning, and institutional operations during the pandemic and provides many other forms of support, including training and communication on key matters relating to the pandemic, and supporting institutions in the event of cluster outbreaks.

In the case of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, students are continuing with the blended modality of learning, which involves a mix of face-to-face tuition and guided self-study. In short, the protocols put in place during lockdown level 3 are still in place for teaching and learning, and for the conduct of examinations. Both these processes were successfully managed in the 2020 academic year and will continue in 2021. Higher Health is actively involved in colleges to assist with symptomatic staff and students, and the management of positive cases when these are identified. Where the incidence of positive cases is of concern, colleges are given the flexibility to shut down the affected campus for a limited period, in agreement with their respective Councils and Regional Offices, and provide a catch-up timetable for the days lost.

Teaching and learning at Community Education and Training (CET) colleges:

* The Department has reviewed the 2020 Curriculum Recovery Plan for CET colleges and will adjust in relation to COVID directives.
* The Department is aware that the implementation of the recovery plan will necessitate amendments to the CET college calendar to ensure that students cover the curriculum. This has financial and labour implications (time for tuition will be increasingly informed by the time lost, implying more hours worked by lecturers) which the Department will deal with internally, e.g. engaging labour organisations and the reprioritisation of the budget.
* An extra R45 million has been allocated by National Treasury to CET colleges for ensuring the safety of students and staff in compliance with COVID-19 regulations; provision of personal protective equipment, sanitisers and rotation of attendance to ensure social distancing.