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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1287**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 19/06/2020**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 22 OF 2020**

**Prof B Bozzoli (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology:**

(1) What is the estimated total cost to be incurred by (a) his department and (b) institutions of higher education and training to prepare for the reopening of their facilities after the easing of the hard lockdown to curb the spread of Covid-19;

(2) whether (a) his department and/or (b) institutions of higher education and training will be employing additional staff to ensure that (i) social distancing and (ii) other essential health protections have been put in place; if not, in each case, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details in each case?

**NW1655E**

**REPLY:**

1. (a) The Department has allocated R1.1 million and reprioritised R1.5 million for the management of COVID-19 within its offices, i.e. four buildings at head office and six regional offices. The budget is meant to cover the supply of masks to 3 800 employees, procurement of sanitisers, scanners, personal protective equipment for the cleaning staff, decontamination and deep cleaning of offices. In view of the capacity constraints in cleaning services, a service provider had to be procured for deep cleaning and augment the existing capacity for a three months period. In addition to the above, the Department is in the processes of procuring emergency and pyscho-social support services, stands for sanitisers with foot pedals, thermal cameras and digital scanners as the small hand-held scanners are proving to be unreliable. The additional needs will amount to R2.3 million. In total, the Department will incur expenses to the total value of R5.0 million

(b) Letters were sent to universities on 13 May 2020 requesting them to submit costed Teaching, Learning and Assessment Plans, as well as Campus Readiness Plans to the Department by 19 May 2020. Universities submitted costed Campus Readiness Plans, which varied considerably with respect to what institutions wanted to implement and with regards to the funding required and the equipment requested. Funding required varied from as little as R2.1 million to R 402.8 million. Some suggested items were large infrastructure changes that would not be possible. The total cost of the submitted plans was R1.85 billion. This was assessed as unrealistic as many items indicated were unnecessary.

 The Department, in consultation with Higher Health who assessed these plans, decided that there are certain legitimate expenses that institutions will incur that they could not have been budgeted for prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Department should consider providing a second COVID-19 Responsiveness Grant (CRG-2) to assist institutions with these costs. The Minister has been requested to approve the re-prioritisation of R526.3 million from the 2020/21 earmarked grants not yet transferred to assist universities to pay for unbudgeted items for campus readiness and health and safety measures over the next period.

TVET Colleges have been able to reprioritize approximately R780 million from their current 2020 operational budgets to assist with COVID 19 related expenditure.

Total cost to be incurred by Community Education and Training (CET) colleges is
R27 million to prepare for the reopening of their facilities after the easing of the lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19.

(2)  (a) The Department had planned to acquire additional capacity in the form of nurses within the Employee Health and Welfare unit but has since entered into a partnership with the Health and Welfare SETA for the provision of nursing services to do screening and contact tracing. The Department will be increasing its cleaning capacity by employing more cleaners at head office and in colleges, and in particular Community Learning Centres colleges that do not have dedicated cleaners as they are using the Department of Basic Education’s facilities.

 (b) (i) Universities’ plans make provision for the employment of additional staff where required. All universities have made provision for physical distancing in their plans.

 Social distancing has been prioritised in TVET colleges firstly through the staggered return of different student cohorts over a 7-week period, as well as through the splitting of classes and revision of timetables. These arrangements will not require additional lecturers.

 The CET colleges are not employing additional staff; however, the following conditions have been applied in determining the resumption of classes. Only colleges that have satisfied the social distancing requirements have allowed staff and students to return effective from 23 June 2020. The return of different categories of CET college staff to their workstations and students to their learning sites is subject to readiness of the colleges and learning sites as well as appropriate social distancing measures put in place by colleges.

 (ii) All universities have made provision for essential health and safety items. The Department has recommended to the Minister that funding through the proposed CRG -2 be approved for the following categories as advised by Higher Health:

* Requirements for environmental and regular cleaning in line with the health and safety protocols, including cleaning equipment and material and the appointment of additional cleaning staff.
* Personal protective equipment appropriate for front-line staff, staff in university clinics and the general student and staff population.
* Internal isolation and quarantine facilities (levels 4 - 2 of the risk-adjusted strategy) and external facilities (only if this is necessary after level 1 has been announced and 100% of students have returned to the campus).
* Clinical support in the form of locums at the university clinic, mental health support, etc.
* Screening stations and equipment. This may include additional staff.

TVET colleges have been monitored over the last 6 weeks in terms of their readiness to receive staff and students. By mid-June 2020, all the protocols for COVID-19 compliance, as set out by the Department of Health and the Guidelines for PSET institutions for Management of COVID-19, were above 90% readiness. As at 26 June 2020, the state of readiness was at 98%. Higher Health trained staff across all colleges on implementing the protocols.

All CET colleges have assured the Department that personal protective equipment for staff and students were procured from the budget set aside to deal with COVID-19.