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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1825**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 32 OF 2020**

**Mrs N J Nolutshungu (EFF) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology:**

(1) Whether all universities have the means to conduct lessons via virtual platforms; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2) whether he has found that all students have access to the necessary tools to receive any learning via virtual platforms; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details?

**NW2200E**

**REPLY:**

(1)  All 26 universities are implementing remote multimodal teaching and learning plans, drawing on a range of strategies depending on the context. The implementation of these plans are being supported in part by a COVID-19 Responsiveness Grant allocated to each university by the Department of Higher Education and Training, which supplements the funds that universities themselves have allocated from Council-controlled funds to enable teaching and learning to proceed during this unprecedented time. All the plans have a component of digital learning through online and/or offline means. The universities have learning management systems in place that serve as virtual platforms for teaching, learning and assessment, and in addition to other platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Collaborate, WhatsApp, etc.

(2) Three resources (tools) impact on students' ability to access virtual platforms, i.e. devices, data and connectivity. Part of the universities' multimodal plans involve supporting those students who do not have devices to acquire these and allocating data to students. Data has been allocated to most university students who required it, and submitted correct details. Information collected from universities indicated that by 6 August 2020, 90% of undergraduate students, including 92% of NSFAS-funded students were being allocated data. Good progress has been made in supporting students to acquire devices. The information submitted by universities indicates that 64% of undergraduate students who required devices have been supported to attain these, including 63% of NSFAS-funded students. The balance of NSFAS-funded students will acquire devices through the NSFAS-led central procurement process. For students who do not have laptops at present, or who live in areas with no connectivity, some universities are providing teaching and learning materials in paper-based form or electronically on USBs, as part of their multimodal approach.