**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION No. 3425**

**“3425. Dr A Lotriet (DA) to ask the Minister of Science and Technology:**

**Whether the discontinuation of the student programme at the SA Astronomical Observatory (SAAO) will have any impact on the future need for scientists in the field of Astronomy; if so, what is her department doing to remedy the situation at the SAAO?ˮ**

**NW4086E**

**REPLY**

Yes, the discontinuation of these programmes could have a negative impact on SAAO science operations and hence training of scientists, if not addressed. Telescopes and astronomy instruments that are used by astronomers are maintained and developed by optical, mechanical and electronic engineers/technicians. SAAO is the ideal ground to develop and sustain the skills of local engineers and technicians who are developing instrumentation at the cutting edge of astronomy. These skills are needed to operate and develop the telescopes located at Sutherland, and discontinuation of the student programme will lead to fewer young astronomers, engineers, and technicians available to service the needs of the SAAO and the country for the development of instrumentation in the medium to long term. SAAO has motivated for an increase in its core grant and the Astronomy sub-Agency, within the NRF, will be including this request in an Implementation Plan for Multi-wavelength Astronomy, which is currently being drafted by the NRF and will submitted to the DST at the end of September 2015. The Department will then assess the feasibility of increasing allocations to the SAAO for this purpose.