**Memorandum from the Parliamentary Office**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 3849**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 30/10/2015**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 45 OF 2015)**

**Mr M S Mbatha (EFF) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:**

1. Whether, in view of a report that he received in 2012 from a working group chaired by a certain person (name furnished), which he commissioned to investigate the possibility of fee-free university education, the specified report shows that a fee-free university education is possible; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
2. when will he release the specified report to the public?

**NO4625E**

**REPLY:**

1. Yes, I have investigated the feasibility of providing free quality education for the poor and working class. In 2012, the Ministerial Working Group on Fee-Free Higher Education was established, to investigate and advise on the feasibility of making university education fee-free for the poor in South Africa. The responsibilities of the Working Group included the following:
2. determine the actual cost of introducing fee-free university education for poor people in South Africa; in other words, what would it cost South Africa to offer fee-free university education to cover people classified as poor;
3. suggest a working definition of poor people in South Africa, if necessary suggesting different categories and how all can be provided fee-free university education;
4. consider existing policy provision and broadly consult documentation of other task teams/working groups in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) which deal or dealt with related fields;
5. examine various models and options of providing fee-free higher education for poor people used elsewhere in the world and make recommendations to the Minister; and
6. contemplate all possible implications and consequences of providing fee-free university education for the poor.

The Working Group acknowledged that at this point in time in the development of South Africa, a well-considered system of free university education for the poor could go a long way towards increasing both access to and the quality of higher education, and in so doing help to tackle unemployment and poverty, reduce inequality and deepen democracy. It concluded that free university education for the poor in South Africa is feasible, but will require significant additional funding for both the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the university system.

The Ministerial Working Group on Fee-Free Higher Education advised that fee-free university education for the poor is feasible, if built on the current NSFAS cost sharing and recovery model. The implementation of fee-free university education is dependent on significant funding being made available, but the quantum of funding required varies depending on the range of parameters and policy decisions.

The report recommended that NSFAS be strengthened to implement the scheme and that a policy dialogue should be put in place to discuss the parameters and develop regulations for implementation. However, before the final policy and regulations are published, funding to support the scheme must be committed.

A Policy Dialogue comprising of the DHET, NSFAS, Universities South Africa, the University Council Chairs Forum, National Treasury, the South African Union of Students and the Council on Higher Education has been established to identify current and projected funding challenges and propose policy and legislative amendments in line with the recommendations of the Working Group on fee-free education, as well as the recommendations articulated in the National Development Plan that “all students who qualify for NSFAS must be provided access to full funding through loans and bursaries to cover costs of tuition, books, accommodation and living expenses”.

1. A copy of the report is available on the following link:

<http://www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/OrgUniversities.aspx>

Compiler/contact persons:

Ext:

DIRECTOR – GENERAL

STATUS:

DATE:

REPLY TO QUESTION 3849 APPROVED/NOT APPROVED/AMENDED

Dr BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

STATUS:

DATE: