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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 481**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 26/2/2021**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 4 OF 2021**

**Ms C V King (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

(a) What is the nature of his discussions with the Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies on reasonable data to students and (b)(i) how and (ii) on what date will this be rolled out?

**NW537E**

**REPLY:**

1. The Ministers of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and Communications and Digital Technologies met on 30 March 2020 and agreed on the importance of data for students and established a Ministerial Task Team (MTT) on zero-rating to advise the Ministers on the implementation of affordable access to data for education and training purposes over the short, medium and long term.

The two Ministers also met with all Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) on the urgent implementation of zero-rating and data bundles.

1. The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies also published the government's call for telecommunication companies to provide free access to educational websites to support online teaching and learning. According to Section 9.1 of the Electronic Communications, Postal and Broadcasting Directions issued under Regulation 10(8) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) (Government Notice No 417 of 26 March 2020), “electronic communications service licensees must provide zero-rated access to local educational content websites”.

The Department of Higher Education and Training has adopted a hybrid approach combining zero-rating and “educational data bundles”.  The Departments of Higher Education and Training, and Communications and Digital Technologies, concluded the negotiation on the standardisation of data pricing and conditions with MNOs early in April 2020. Students across the board made use of these offers through their institutions.

The November 2020 report received from universities shows that data bundle provision to students remains high across the system. The average across the system for all undergraduate students is 94%. Some of the reasons for lower than 100% deployment at some institutions include students not submitting their cell phone numbers; incorrect cell phone numbers submitted; no device to connect with; no connectivity; and service provider glitches; including some SIM-cards being blocked for various reasons.

Nationally only 10% of National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funded students in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have access to data. Data for NSFAS funded TVET students will only become effective when devices are made available to students in 2021.

The zero-rating of Departmental and public institutions’ websites is 97% completed. This is following directions issued under Regulation 10(8) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) (Government Notice No 417 of 26 March 2020). Service providers providing zero-rating include Electronic Communications Service Licensees (Mobile Network Operators and Internet Service Providers).

As of 1 June 2020, private higher education institutions and colleges, and private publishers’ websites were also implemented. The full list of websites that have been zero-rated has been published on the individual institutional and Departmental websites.