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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 766**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 6 OF 2021**

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

What measures will be put in place to (a) assist students who were unable to write exams due to the challenges brought by lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19 with no access to (i) data, (ii) laptops and/or (iii) learning material and (b)(i) ensure that the specified students do not repeat the academic year and (ii) support the students during the continued lockdown?

**NW889E**

**REPLY:**

1. Universities have each put in place different measures to support students during the COVID-19 lockdown period that affected the 2020 academic year.  The information provided below is not specific to any one institution, but rather provides a system overview. Specific information would have to be obtained from individual institutions.

According to the February COVID-19 lockdown monitoring report received by the Department, there were few students who remained disengaged from their studies. Universities adopted emergency remote multi-modal teaching and learning methodologies in line with their own resources and circumstances. In some institutions, this meant online learning and teaching support and in others the delivery of print-based teaching and learning materials. Many universities also assisted students with the acquisition of laptops and in the provision of data.

Universities also utilised different strategies for assessments and put in place a number of different strategies to engage students. These include:

* Designating the first two to three months of 2021 to be an adjustment period (a catch-up period) including the identification of students with one or two modules outstanding for the completion of their degrees with the focus to provide additional support to students who were left behind in 2020.
* Students received tuition and assistance and were also allowed the opportunity to resubmit assignments where applicable as well as sit for deferred activities or reassessments.
* Students who had not been in regular contact with lecturers were contacted through telephone calls, emails, and SMS.
* Student leaders in some institutions also assisted to contact students who had been out of regular contact with universities.
* Students who had struggled to engage with their studies during lockdown were able to return to campus when it was possible to return.
* Some institutions scheduled supplementary examinations for February - March 2021.
* Some institutions provided additional assessment opportunities for students who could not complete their assessments.
* Extensions for the submission of continuous assessment tasks for students who were delayed by the late arrival of laptops.

1. During the 2020 academic year, the Department monitored teaching and learning at universities through a monitoring report, which will be redesigned for the 2021 academic year. This will allow the Department to report at a high level on some of the indicators, including access to data and devices.

Three main types of programmes are offered at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, i.e. NATED Report 191 Engineering Studies which are offered in Trimesters, NATED Report 191 Business and Services Studies which are offered in Semesters, and the National Certificate (Vocational) [NCV] which are offered as year programmes. In 2020, the Department took a decision to reduce the number of Trimesters offered from 3 to 2 and Semesters from 2 to 1 in order to cater for the loss of teaching and learning time during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown periods. The academic calendar for the NCV was extended.

For Report 191 programmes, those students who would not have managed to write their examinations in any of the trimesters and semester in 2020 would be accommodated in the normal academic trimesters and/or semesters in 2021. The NCV students who could not write their examinations in 2020 will have an opportunity to write their examinations during the supplementary period which runs from 08 March 2021 to 01 April 2021.