



MEDIA STATEMENT

SA higher education adopts policy framework to mitigate HIV and AIDS at institutions

Johannesburg, 30 October 2008 – A Policy Framework on HIV and AIDS for Higher Education Institutions in South Africa was adopted by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, and the 23 public sector higher education institutions in South Africa.

The purpose and intention of the Policy Framework is to guide and inform higher education institutions as they develop and operationalise their institutional strategies or refine existing initiatives to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS in the higher education sector.

The Policy Framework follows after months of research, workshops and consultations with stakeholders across the sector. It is jointly owned by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) and the Department of Education.

The document recognises that collectively and individually higher education institutions must act to prevent new HIV infections and to provide access to treatment, care and support for staff and students infected or affected by the pandemic.

Mobilisation of leadership across the sector to drive and sustain responses to HIV and AIDS is the first specific goal being sought through the adoption of the Policy Framework. That HESA comprises 23 Vice-Chancellors means that the organisation will have a crucial role to play in providing that leadership.

In her address to the Vice Chancellors and other dignitaries present at the formal adoption ceremony today, Minister Pandor said: "The word "leadership" appears frequently in the policy framework, which leaves us with little doubt about what is expected of senior figures in the sector and in institutions of higher education. This emphasis is significant. Indeed, what is needed in addressing this pandemic is the inspiration, the drive and the passion that are the hallmarks of leadership."

Secondly, the Framework sets out that a human rights-based approach should be used to create healthy and safe environments for all members of the higher education community – staff and students alike.

The Minister welcomed the idea that the sector needed to look at the funding of HIV and AIDS interventions. "We will soon have the prevalence figures available that will help us appreciate the size of the challenge within our campus communities. This will help us comprehend the financial implications of developing a comprehensive response that is sustainable and geared to the real size of the problem we face."

Thirdly, the Framework stipulates that the sector's activities must ensure that the sector plays an integral part in the national response to HIV and AIDS. Intense discussions and consultations were facilitated to build a shared understanding of what types of activities are the responsibility of the National Education Department and HESA, as opposed to institutional level responsibilities and activities.

"The Policy Framework acknowledges the existing prevention, treatment, care, support and research activities that are taking place across the sector. It also provides a road map with adequate guidelines for the institutions that are



**Funded under the European Programme
for Reconstruction and Development**



only now starting to consider and operationalise sustained HIV and AIDS programmes,” explains Dr Shaidah Asmall, programme director of HEAIDS, the HIV and AIDS programme of the higher education sector.

The Policy Framework is one of the core components of the HEAIDS Programme, and one of many target outcomes expected from the programme which is sponsored by the European Union.

Also speaking at today’s function Dr Theuns Eloff, the Chairperson of the Board of HESA, said that the responsibilities of the Education Ministry and HESA were to champion the sector’s activities on HIV and AIDS including the mobilisation of resources, advice and technical support, and country-level monitoring and evaluation mechanisms needed for the implementation of the Framework.

He said that at the institutional level, all 23 public higher education institutions needed to develop, refine and operationalise their institutional policies in accordance with the national road map. “And critically, this responsibility includes a sense of financial ownership for our own institutional policy and its implementation. Only by incorporating implementation of each institutional HIV and AIDS policy within the institution’s overall strategic, operational and reporting plans and activities will we really be able to harness the combined intellectual and practical resources we have within the sector. We will also be able to identify good practices and learn from each other.”

In closing, the Minister said: “I believe the joint adoption of the Policy Framework is a window of opportunity for higher education as a sector to renew and strengthen our commitment to responding to HIV and AIDS with the seriousness and the magnitude that the problem demands.”

ends

Notes for editors and reporters:

The Higher Education HIV/AIDS Programme (HEAIDS) is a Department of Education initiative undertaken, on behalf of the department by Higher Education South Africa and funded by the European Union under the European Programme for Reconstruction and Development. The HEAIDS Programme was introduced to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions to participate in national efforts to mitigate HIV and AIDS. The HEAIDS strategy was formulated in support of institutions’ mandate to:

- Undertake advanced teaching and prepare graduates for responsible roles in the world of work.
- Perform research, share knowledge and provide intellectual leadership.
- Develop campus communities as nurturing and enlightened environments for students and staff.

Issued on behalf of HEAIDS

By Meropa Communications, tel 27 11 772 1000

Contacts: Maria Djordjevic 27 82 334 6192 email mariad@meropa.co.za; Jo-Anne Collinge 27 82 787 0202 email joannec@meropa.co.za; or Khomotso Makuse tel 27 11 772 1006 email kgomotsom@meropa.co.za



**Funded under the European Programme
for Reconstruction and Development**