

12 June 2009

HESA MEDIA STATEMENT ON THE MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The HESA Board met on 10 June 2009 to discuss the challenges facing higher education and agreed on a set of imperatives to advance the interests of the sector. These were shared during dinner with the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande.

Dr Theuns Eloff, Chairperson of HESA, confirmed that higher education was a public good and universities national resources. The core mandate of universities was to provide quality higher education, recognizing the diversity of its campuses, its missions and its constituencies. He said that the necessary conditions for a successful Higher Education sector were transformation, quality, diversity and respect for each other, and adequate funding. He emphasized the complex nature of universities, noting that there was a need continually to balance a number of seemingly opposites. These included:

- knowledge and education on the one hand and skills and training on the other;
- access and success
- national relevance and international credibility
- institutional autonomy and academic freedom on the one hand and public accountability and self-regulation on the other; and
- continuity and stability on the one hand and change and adaptation on the other.

The Minister welcomed the issues that HESA grappled with. He emphasized that "... it is imperative that poor students should not be denied the opportunity to quality higher education". The Minister stated the need, in the light of the new ministry's combined emphasis on higher education and training, to reconceptualise the notion of Higher Education, the Further Education and Training Colleges (FET's) and the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAS). This would constitute a post secondary education system in the country. He requested the assistance of the HE sector in this important quest.

The Minister also emphasized the need to increase the capacity for quality higher education opportunities especially for scarce and critical skills for black students, despite the well acknowledged fact of poorly prepared first year students. He appealed to universities to make higher education as affordable as possible and to do everything in their power to develop the next generation of academics and researchers. In the light of

the release of the Soudien report on transformation and social cohesion, he asked vice-chancellors to ensure that institutional culture and the transformation of institutions reflect the values of the Constitution.

The highly constructive meeting ended with consensus that there was a need for a longer engagement between the higher education leadership and the Ministry in the near future.

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