



higher education & training

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Higher Education and Training
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- To: FET College Students
FET College Staff
FET College Management
FET College Councils
FET College Provincial Units
- CC. Heads of Provincial Education Departments
FETCEO
SACPO
CTU-SADTU
CTU-ITU
PSA
NEHAWU

Dear Colleagues

I write to update you on developments in three areas: the transition of Colleges from a concurrent national and provincial function to an exclusive national function; the FET Summit process; and progress in the ELRC with respect to College lecturers.

As you know, there are expectations that Further Education and Training (FET) colleges will occupy a critical space in the national post-school education and training landscape. Key policy speeches of the Minister of Higher Education and Training, the Minister of Finance and the President have indicated clearly that the contribution of the colleges to our acute middle-level skills crisis will be invaluable.

1. The Transition of Colleges From a Concurrent National and Provincial Function to an Exclusive National Function

I am sure that you are aware that Cabinet has in June 2010 supported a request from Minister Nzimande that work should begin on a constitutional amendment to make FET Colleges an exclusive national function. The decision to seek a Constitutional amendment to make FET Colleges part of the national post-school education and training system has been supported by all provinces in the Council of Education Ministers and all MECs have urged the Minister to make interim arrangements to hasten the move to national. The need to make all legislation applicable to 'post-school' education an exclusive national competence was unanimously confirmed on the basis that an integrated approach is needed to deliver quality education and work-related skills. There are a number of advantages to designating statutory powers and functions relating to FET colleges as an exclusive national competence. These include improved planning and articulation with the university and the skills development sectors, and the development of a clearer mandate for the delivery of intermediate skills for young people.

The Cabinet decision follows the shift in funding of FET Colleges through conditional grants on the budget of the Department of Higher Education and Training under the Division of Revenue Act, 2010 from the 2010/11 financial year in anticipation of the functional shift which was announced in the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement by the Minister of Finance in 2009. The use of the Inter Governmental Relations Framework Act to achieve coordination was approved by the Council of Education Ministers, and Protocols in terms of that Act have been signed between the national and provincial authorities to support the implementation of the Conditional Grant.

Until changes in legislation are effected, the FET Act remains in place, and the DHET is working closely with provinces to support them in the responsibilities they have in terms of the Act. In its simplest terms, the line function remains in place through the Provinces.

We will keep you informed of progress.

2. The FET Summit process

The proposed shift in functions has been supported by all stakeholders in an inclusive process of preparing for an FET Summit in September. Stakeholders include Business Unity South Africa, the Education Labour Relations Council, the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), the Federation of Unions of South Africa, the Further Education and Training Colleges Employers' Organisation, the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa, the National Teachers' Union, the South African Council of Educators, the South African College Principals' Organisation, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union, and the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is aware of the many difficulties that have been experienced in recent years in the FET college subsystem as a result of a complex and incomplete transition, with multiple and overlapping changes of a profound nature for which many were ill-equipped. These difficulties have affected the colleges as institutions in different degrees, and their staff and students: staff have experienced uncertainty with respect to their employment status and conditions of service; many students have experienced the disillusionment of failure in their endeavours; and many colleges have experienced severe financial difficulties. While there have been many examples of excellent and innovative practice in difficult conditions, it seems clear that morale in your institutions has been deeply affected. This is a situation that the DHET is addressing vigorously in close collaboration with all key stakeholders, with a view to stabilizing the situation in the college subsystem for 2011 and providing a platform for a vibrant and productive post-school education and training system (PSETS) in the medium and long term.

A FET Round Table was convened by the ETDP SETA in partnership with the DHET on 9 April 2010. The Round Table brought together all key roleplayers and stakeholders in the FET college subsystem to engage in a rigorous debate informed by an analysis of the challenges facing the colleges.

At the Round Table, stakeholders agreed that a high-level Steering Committee (chaired by the DG of the DHET) will oversee the process of preparing for a broader FET Summit (to be held from 3-4 September 2010) that will contribute to stabilizing the FET college subsystem and build a platform for its long-term development. The task of the Steering Committee (supported by a Summit Working Committee) is to review and approve the work of a number of Task Teams formed to support the DHET in the following areas of work:

- (1) Models of autonomy and legal/policy actions
- (2) Programmes
- (3) Planning and funding for 2011 and beyond
- (4) Examinations
- (5) Planning support for colleges for 2011 with regard to staffing and learner recruitment

Each Task Team has a short-term view (the stabilization of the sector and planning for 2011) and a long-term view (the contribution of the colleges to a vibrant PSETS). Each team includes at least one senior DHET official, and representatives from colleges, unions, business and other stakeholders. The work of the Task Teams is funded by the Swiss – South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI), and I would like to take this opportunity to thank SSACI on behalf of the DHET for this invaluable support.

The Task Teams are engaging in three types of activity:

- desktop research;
- field research in a sample of 14 colleges to ascertain the nature and causes of the problems that are being experienced; and
- discussions with representatives of stakeholder organizations, colleges and the DHET.

This work has considerably boosted the capacity of the DHET to understand and address the challenges that you face, particularly as the Department goes through the complex process of taking on the function of managing the college subsystem as a national competence. The Task Teams, accountable to the stakeholders represented in the FET Summit Steering Committee, will produce a consolidated report in the course of August 2010 that will serve as the basis for the FET Summit discussions in September. As their work progresses I will continue to keep you informed.

Subsequent to the FET Summit, and in continuous consultation with stakeholders, a range of recommendations will be presented to the Minister, who is following the process closely and is extremely supportive of this collaborative approach to policy and planning.

Not everyone will be able to attend the FET Summit, but we are working together to make sure that as much information reaches you both before and after the summit. Stakeholder organizations have been working hard to inform their members of developments, and these processes are likely to intensify as we build up to the summit.

The summit website is almost ready and can be accessed at www.fetsummit.org.za or via the JET website www.jet.org.za under 'Events'.

The post-summit processes will be critical. We are planning to inform all Colleges of the recommendations of the Summit, and of the decisions of the Minister. After the Summit, we plan to work intensively with provinces and prioritised colleges to provide support for their operational planning for 2011 and implementation of the summit outcomes.

I am sure you share our hope that the process we are undertaking will open up quality opportunities for all FET learners and potential learners to participate in work-oriented programmes and to engage in sustainable income generation – including the many young people currently not in education, employment or training. The Department of Higher Education and Training is committed to providing support to the colleges to enable them to become institutions of choice for staff and students alike, and a vital resource for social and economic development.

3. Progress in the ELRC with Respect to College Employees

As lecturers will know from their union representatives, negotiations are under way in the ELRC to introduce a new salary and conditions of service dispensation for lecturing staff employed at Public FET Colleges. The parties to the negotiations are the FET Colleges represented by the FETCEO as the employer, and all the lecturing staff employees of the employer as defined in the Further Education and Training Act, 2006, whether such employees are members of trade union parties to this agreement or not.

Progress is being made based on a shared understanding that the FET College Sector is expected to make seminal contributions to: reducing nationally identified skills shortages; creating decent jobs; and making South Africans more employable.

An FETCBU Task team has drafted a proposed Collective Agreement which was presented to the FETCBU for consideration on 6 August 2010.

Our capacity to communicate effectively with Colleges has been affected by the complex processes involved in establishing an entirely new department, and also because we need to work closely with the provinces, which continue to have primary responsibility for Colleges under the FET Act. We are committed to improving the flow of information as we move towards the FET Summit in September and

implement the summit outcomes over the years to come. We are also committed to developing strong support strategies and mechanisms to enable Colleges to deliver high-quality education and training in the post-school system, closely articulated with higher education and skills development initiatives. We are confident that this will be achieved, under the direction of a single Ministry that is committed to the development of the Colleges as institutions of choice for staff and students alike.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Metcalfe', written in a cursive style.

Professor Mary Metcalfe

DG: Higher Education and Training