

PARLIAMENTARY MEDIA BRIEFING BY THE MINISTER
OF EDUCATION, PROFESSOR KADER ASMAL: HUMAN
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMPLOYMENT
STRATEGY, 18 February 2003

1. The Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa provides an implementation plan that will ensure that the people of this country are equipped to participate optimally in society, to be able to lead better lives and to fully participate in creating work or benefiting from it.

2. Central to the HRD Strategy are government interventions that seek to address the problem of scarce skills. Notwithstanding the difficulties of elevating certain skills over others, remarkable progress has been made with regard to allocation of bursaries and loans through the National Students Financial Aid Scheme. During the financial year 2001/2002 R635 million was administered by the scheme in partnership with 21 universities and 15 technikons to 93 532 beneficiaries.

3. The highest proportion of the awards was allocated to commerce degrees and diplomas (22%), 13% to administration, 11% to engineering and 10% to science, in line with the scarce skills' targets of the Strategy. The Department of Labour has also disbursed 1 500 bursaries and loans through NSFAS for undergraduates and the National Research Foundation (NRF) for postgraduate studies. This joint effort will ensure that resources that government is allocating to skills development reach as many people as possible, especially those that would have been denied access to higher education because of lack of funds. This year we would like to invite private companies to align their corporate social investment strategies to the HRD Strategy to maximise the impact of all the funds that are contributed towards bursaries and scholarships.

4. In recognition of the urgency of developing a sound skills base in our country, my Ministry has declared the 2003 the Year of Further Education and Training (FET). The intention is to strengthen the supply-side of skills by building institutional capacity of the FET sector, both in terms of quality of provision and responsiveness to the needs of our country. This sector is critical in the skill revolution that we began when the HRD Strategy was launched and we need to collectively harness the role played by public FET institutions in the provision of learnerships. The learnership campaign, that was recently launched by the Minister of Labour, aims to have 50 000 learnerships by March 2004 - a major undertaking that requires even stronger collaboration between the two Ministries, including SETAs, education and training providers and employers. The campaign is mainly targeting our young people that are unable to participate in the economy because of lack of skills. The success of the campaign will be reliant on the participation of public institutions as the project is taken to scale as well as willingness of employers to take learners on board. The ongoing restructuring of the FET landscape will create an enabling framework for taking the learnership campaign to scale.

5. The higher education sector has also been undergoing a major restructuring exercise, which is now at an advanced stage and the legal processes involved in facilitating mergers will commence soon. Parallel to that process is a plan to devise a new funding mechanism intended to improve the quality of research output in higher education institutions in line with the principle of improving research capacity articulated in the Research and Development Strategy for South Africa. The post-merger higher education sector will be a vibrant one that plays a key role in innovation, research and development that the country requires.

6. At the secondary school level there was significant improvement in participation rates and learners' performance in science subjects

that will enhance the quality of the intake of matriculants to science and engineering studies at higher education levels. In 2002, we recorded a significant improvement in the proportion of learners that performed well in mathematics and science. In 2001, 46.7% candidates passed mathematics, which increased, to 56.1% in 2002. The proportion of candidates who passed physical science in 2001 was 68.6%, which increased to 76.4% in 2002. It is clear that the effort of our department to improve the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics and science is beginning to bear fruit. The performance of learners in the 102 schools that are part of the maths and science projects improved significantly. A separate report on the progress that has been in these schools will be released by my department in the near future. Aggregate performance of matriculants also increased to 68.9%, a 7.2% percentage point improvement.

7. The matriculant of 2002 will have the advantage of obtaining information and advice regarding offerings at all participating institutions at the National Higher Education Information and Application Service that the Ministry will be establishing. The service will assist potential students find information on study grants available, courses available and the institutions offering them under one roof. This will allow students to make informed decisions when they choose careers.

8. The progression of learners through the education and training system is another key factor in building a skills base. In line with the Strategy's intention to open doors of learning for all our people the Ministries of Education and Labour commissioned a study team to review the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and to recommend strategies that will ensure that implementation is accelerated and that the principles of the NQF are upheld. The study team made its recommendations last year. Subsequently the public was invited to comment and there was an overwhelming in-principle support for the NQF and what it stood

for. Based on the two processes the Ministries of Labour and Education will soon be releasing a plan of taking the NQF into the next phase.