

Support for varsity students to complete academic year

The Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Buti Manamela, says the department has rolled out a multi-model approach to support students to regain lost time and finish the academic year.



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“The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation requested all universities to adopt a multi-model learning and teaching approach, which includes, but is not limited to, online learning.

“The approach includes teaching and learning support through the delivery of print-based teaching and learning material, and material on USB memory sticks.

“The Department of Higher Education and Training worked with all universities to develop multi-model teaching and learning plans, which were approved by the Minister and funded in part through the allocation of the ring-fenced Covid-19 response grant, which is to be complemented by funding that universities [redirected] from their own council-controlled budgets,” said Manamela on Tuesday when responding to oral questions in the National Council of Provinces.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw many sectors, including the education sector, having to adapt to a new normal, where many students had to resume learning at home after government adopted a risk-adjusted strategy post lockdown.

Addressing MPs, Manamela said all universities included the allocation of data bundles in their plans, and on average, over 90% of undergraduate students have been receiving data for teaching and learning purposes over the past few months.

Many universities also included the acquisition of laptops for students. To date, the latest university report shows that on average, 72% of university students indicated they needed a device and they have been supported to obtain one.

“The remaining students may be supported to acquire devices through the NSFAS [National Student Financial Aid Scheme]-led process,” said Manamela.

The ministry and the department also negotiated with mobile network operators for teaching and learning sites of universities to be zero-rated, thereby enabling access without any data costs.

“The Minister, however, recognises that some students, particularly poor students, may be living in environments which are not conducive to effective online learning.

“The universities prioritised these students to return to campus, as lockdown alert levels allowed. Catch-up programmes are being implemented to support the students to successfully complete their teaching and learning programme,” said Manamela.

Further, the ministry has released the latest protocols from Higher Health for the 2020/21 examination period in the Post-Schooling Education and Training (PSET) sector.

The protocols will guide 26 universities, 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and other post-schooling institutions on how to conduct invigilated examinations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A dedicated Higher Health mental health 24/7 toll-free crisis helpline has also been set-up to assist the higher education sector. The helpline is available on 0800 36 36 36.

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