

Higher Education Minister to meet with student association

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Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande is to meet with the South African Further Education and Training Students Association on Friday to iron out ongoing concerns that the association has regarding the state of the country's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges.



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Speaking in Pretoria on Thursday, Nzimande said he had met with heads of the higher education and training sector between January 17 and 24. He mentioned that he had tried unsuccessfully to meet with the association before, who have been critical of him over the dire state of affairs at TVET colleges.

Nzimande said the association was continuing its campaign to address challenges at TVET colleges, including financial constraints and unqualified lecturers. "I had also attempted to meet the association ... however, they were unable to meet me as they are engaged in a campaign to raise their issues. Nevertheless we have agreed to meet tomorrow [Friday]," Nzimande said.

Regarding readiness for the current academic year, he said the National Student Financial Aid Scheme had paid R1.3bn to the country's 26 public universities and TVET colleges for disadvantaged student registration. "On the matter of historic debt, broad agreement was reached with universities and colleges to ensure humane and transparent debt management and relief processes to assist academically successful students, so that they can register in 2017, where this is possible," he said.

Regarding the TVET college protests and the Fees Must Fall protests, Nzimande said while the concerns being raised were genuine, it was critical that demonstrators allowed the academic year to commence uninterrupted: "Poorly qualified lecturers are a genuine issue. Some have no practical experience whatsoever. There are things we are doing to address that. We have partnered with universities to buffer checks on dedicated lecturer qualifications."

Nzimande also said the department would look to roll out a pilot version of the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme, aimed at assisting 1,508 "missing-middle students" at six universities and one TVET college. He said the Fees Commission's final report would make long-term recommendations based on the pilot project, its funding needs, as well as its scope.

Source: Business Day

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