

## **Socialist policies devalue the higher education sector**

By **Chantel King MP** - DA Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Science & Technology

Chairperson and colleagues,

The July unrest, state capture and the ANC's stance on the Ukraine matter all have a common denominator – they lead to decreasing investor confidence and a rise in CPI, leaving us at a very low point as a nation; financially, morally and mentally.

With a 4.1% increase in education as per the 2021 Education Price Index, university students will not be able to offset the rise in tuition and accommodation fees.

This year, tuition fees increased by 4.3% and accommodation fees increased by 6.3%.

This will lead to a policy dilemma on how to spend money to best address poverty, inequality and unemployment.

The R130, 134 billion allocation for the academic year presents an obstacle in terms of the size of the allocation as well as the impact that results from the allocation.

**With a decreasing tax base exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and rising inflation costs, socialist policy funding will not be feasible in the higher education sector.**

The biggest culprit is fee-free higher education, with the Minister constantly contradicting himself on the sustainability of fee-free higher education. The funding shortfall to fund fee-free higher education had Nsfas in a tailspin with the Chairperson and CEO too afraid to allocate funds without confirmation from the treasury. This resulted in students at CPUT sleeping in corridors and the street due to funding decisions not being verified. The IT systems failure did not make it any easier for student appeals with many still awaiting their appeal outcomes. To avoid the funding dilemma a tiered funding model should be incorporated to ensure equitable funding inclusive of the missing middle.

During the health mini plenary, the Minister of Health expressed his concern about the shortage of doctors in the country. To push the socialist policy even further the department of home affairs decided that most professions in the health sector should not be added to the critical skills list. The admissions policies, at most universities that were transparent to divulge their intake in PAIA applications, brought to the fore the deliberate attempt to discriminate against and minimize the uptake of minority groups into the medical profession irrespective of their outstanding academic performance and socio-economic background.

This Apartheid tactic in the guise of transformation is sacrificing equality – fit for purpose for equity which will have a knock-on effect in the health sector with critical skills shortages.

To add insult to injury, the autonomy of institutions is compromised by the forced transformation agenda of the ANC to rule out Afrikaans and Nama Khoi as indigenous languages to South Africa in the latest language policy of the department of higher education.

The impact of socialist policies has created an environment where the autonomy of institutions has been compromised to increase tuition and accommodation funding at the expense of fee-paying students, as was the case at TUT, where a self-funded female student was instructed to vacate her resident room for a NSFAS student.

The Minister in the departments' quest to ensure radical transformation, its entities could not keep up with their mandates. CHE, SAQA and QCTO have dropped the ball drastically.

The council for higher education's pursuit to restructure and reinvent themselves forgot one crucial function, that of ensuring the accreditation of university courses are regularly reviewed to align to the NDP outcomes. The irregular course realignment at WSU could have been avoided had it been dealt with when universities merged with TVET colleges.

This neglect of duties has placed WSU in a precarious position of postponing this year's graduation until realignment issue is addressed.

SAQA's financial and operational constraints can no longer be remedied by cash injections from other line items in the budget. The slow pace of digitization cannot be a stumbling block for national and international qualification accreditation. Similarly, the concern of QCTO.

The turnaround time to issue certification is hampering the employment prospects of students. All of this coupled with the national skills fund's inability to spend the required funds for skills training is tramping on the dream of many.

Minister, I received this email from a gentleman waiting for his Red Seal electrical certificate: "I have only received feedback from the training centre, other than that they send the mail to another person to take care of and in 30min disappears. At SETA and DHET I never receive feedback and QCTO passes the mail down the line. The process should take 18 months but we are waiting for years. We are stuck and seen as unskilled labour instead of the tradesmen we are".

These are the lived realities faced by students on a daily basis. If these obstacles and discrepancies are not addressed, then I am afraid the dream of the President for DHET to be a placement agency for the 10 000 graduates to do in-service training at TVET colleges will not materialize.

Minister while you throw money at grandiose projects and the bill for corruption grew exponentially, the funding of universities decreased in real terms to almost 30% since the inception of democracy.

Minister Ugandan academic Mohmound Mamdani once said of the Makerere University: "The new state stepped in as the guarantor of social justice." We celebrated, but not for long. Soon, the state altered the mode of governance of universities, and we came to confront state-appointed Vice-Chancellors, Deans, and even Heads of Departments. We then discovered the importance of university autonomy".

Decades ago the Kampala Declaration set out to restore university autonomy, 57 years later you want to repeat the Ugandan failed experiment.

There is no mention of a new norm for the level of funding, let alone making up for the past neglect. No pledges to find money elsewhere in this badly designed budget. This crisis has played itself out, with student bursaries not being sufficient to cope and university grant cuts yearly.

We are victims of our successes. Victims? You are in charge! And have been for the past 28 years!

You have failed to accept responsibility. Instead, you are busy restoring the old regime— universities as places to be manipulated, despised, and attacked; and SASCO as the natural holder of the right to protest, violently so.

In the end, Minister, we will keep pushing to address the crises in our higher education system to ensure that higher learning institutions can continue to meet their objective of adequately preparing young South Africans for the job market.