

Budget Debate on Vote 35: Higher Education, Science and Innovation

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House Chairperson,

The Department of Science and Innovation is supposed to be this country's solution to all that plagues our nation.

From this department, we should have long seen innovative and sustainable solutions to our electricity generation and maintenance mess. But, dololo!

To date, there remains no synergy between this department and either of President Ramaphosa's 3 electricity ministries and the planning and monitoring presidential ministry. Firstly because President Ramaphosa's plans are dull and secondly because Minister Nzimande lacks the creative imagination and political will to break those silos.

From this department, we should have long seen modern proposals on how to broaden access to tertiary education. By now you would think that this department, given that we are 12 years into the industrial revolution, would have a least handed Minister Nzimande a digital tertiary education plan that would achieve four very basic things:

1. More students getting access to tertiary institutions of their choice with those who do need to be physically present on campus being able to study at South African institutions from wherever in this world. One's geographic location must never be a reason that hampers their ability to future their studies.
2. Freeing up accommodation spaces for those who do not have any means of studying at home and depend on University and TVET student accommodation to further their studies. This would result in less need for off-campus reses that charge an arm and a leg for a single bed and toilet space.
3. Focusing on making education more affordable for the middle class and missing middle families while increasing government's funding for more poor students. No student should be left behind.
4. Affording young people, the freedom to work and study at institutions of their choice with a competent academic workforce. Young people should never have to choose between putting food on the table and acquiring an education that is practically

attainable, especially in faculties such as humanities & law. We should be able to do both and it is this department's job to ensure the how.

The bottom line here is that not only do we have a lot of catching up to do with the current technological and industrial trends to meet the needs and demands of our nation, but the thinking in this department is just not scientific and innovative enough.

This is also seen in their inability to fund 75% of qualifying National Research Fund applicants. The reason is simple, Minister Blade Nzimande and the ANC's thinking and leadership around innovation are poor, irrelevant and costing us our futures.