

Nzimande picks team to drive change at varsities

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Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande has established a 10-member committee to fast-track transformation in the tertiary sector.



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Nzimande's department has been looking to accelerate transformation in universities, including setting clear targets and indicators.

The demographics of the professoriate should be radically changed, discrimination eliminated and student success and support improved, according to the department.

President Jacob Zuma has signed the Higher Education Amendment Act, which gives Nzimande more powers to intervene in university matters. The law gives the minister the power to determine transformation objectives and put mechanisms in place to ensure the objectives are met.

It also empowers the minister to withhold funding under specific circumstances.

The transformation oversight committee had been appointed for a three-year term, Nzimande said in the Government Gazette.

The committee will be chaired by Prof Andr Keet, a director of the International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice at the University of the Free State. It will monitor progress on transformation in public universities, serve as an expert advisory body, provide independent advice to the minister and the department in fulfilling their oversight roles and assist in strengthening the accountability of universities when it comes to transformation goals.

It will also conduct an assessment of the effect of language policies on institutional culture and social integration.

"Such transformation involves the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning; the elimination of weak administrative systems, especially at historically disadvantaged universities; the elimination of discriminatory practices based on gender, race, class and historical imbalances; the provision of adequate infrastructure so that all universities can meet their mandates in the context of social cohesion," Nzimande said.

In 2008, Naledi Pandor, who was education minister at the time, appointed a ministerial committee on transformation and social cohesion following a racism incident at a University of Free State hostel. That committee observed that racism and sexism were pervasive, and that the pace of redress was painfully slow. It noted serious disjunction between policy and real-life experiences of students and staff in learning, teaching, curriculum, languages, residence life and governance. In its report, the committee recommended that the minister consider establishing a permanent oversight committee to monitor the transformation of higher education.

Source: Business Day

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