

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR ORAL REPLY

QUESTION 209

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Mr M L Fransman (ANC) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:

What (a) has he found the impact to have been of separate and under-development on the skills base, (b) development initiatives has he put in place to expand the skills base deal equitably, (c) was the result or outcome of such interventions and (d) measures has been put in place to ensure that such interventions are aligned with global best practice standards?

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REPLY:

- (a) The impact of separate and under-development on the skills base has a long history. In 1994, South Africa inherited the outcomes of a deliberate policy of under-development of our people. In fact the neglect went back 342 years from Dutch and British colonialism to apartheid. The history of artisan training in South Africa is a vignette of the history of the country – and especially so when viewed through African eyes. Africans had had their own artisanal skills, passed down from generation to generation, for centuries – they made pots, crafted jewellery, built homes and they forged metal to make the tools of war and peace (spears and farming tools). However, after the colonial wars and especially after the colonisers discovered gold (which Africans had been mining for centuries) the picture changed. It was not their skills that were valued, it was their manual labour – and all sorts of vicious measures were undertaken to ensure that it remained cheap – our land was taken, hut and poll taxes were imposed and our movement was fiercely controlled.

In 1926, a range of colour bars were introduced on the mines which ensured that Africans did not gain access to artisanal work, but in other sectors they were excluded by other means. Access to artisanal training was restricted to those who had passed Standard 7 (now Grade 9) – and as Africans were denied access to all but the most modest missionary schools, few met this criterion. However, the white unions at the time organised to ensure that none slipped through the cracks. They forbade their members to train black apprentices – using the threat of expulsion from the union if they did. This did not, of course, prevent many Africans from gaining the skills informally, but they were denied the recognition for the skills they gained.

The years thereafter saw these issues rankle as the lament of skills shortages accompanied the economic growth boom of the 1960s. Employers straddled the divide on the one hand enjoying the benefits of cheap black labour denied basic labour rights, and on the other hankering for a widening pool of cheap skilled labour. The pendulum eventually swung in the 1970s as a result of the union and youth struggles that took place on the back of the economic troubles of the decade. In 1981 the Manpower Training Act was passed which finally opened up trade training to all. However, perversely, just as African youth gained access to apprenticeships, the system as a

whole began to crumble – first because of the withdrawal of the tax incentive system and secondly because of the commercialisation and privatisation of the parastatals that had for years led training in this area.

South Africa now suffers from the twin scourges of high unemployment and a shortage of critical skills needed to drive economic growth and social development. The skills shortage underpins many of the challenges government faces with regard to service delivery, the expansion of decent work and social justice. There is both anecdotal and empirical evidence of skills shortages in a number of occupations and economic sectors within South Africa. It is clear that there is a tangible problem arising from the mismatch between the supply of and demand for skills in the South African labour market.

Between 1994 and 2009, this problem was aggravated by non-alignment in government, with the responsibility for workplace and in-service training of workers located with the Department of Labour and the formal education system the responsibility of the Department of Education and the provincial education departments.

- (b) While there have been some advances over the past 16 years in alleviating the skills challenge, the intention of government now is that the two departments of education – Basic Education and Higher Education and Training cooperate to establish and manage the National Qualifications Framework, and develop an integrated approach to education and training.

As many of you know, my department has the responsibility for higher education, the college sector, all post-literacy adult education, and broadly workplace skills development. The latter includes the infrastructure of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), the National Skills Authority (NSA) and the National Skills Fund (NSF). The restructuring of the education and training landscape over the past over the past year poses challenges and opportunities that require our collective thinking and participation.

The glue which holds the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) together is the preparation of post-school youth for the labour market and to help them to further develop the skills, values and ethics needed to participate usefully in the social, political and cultural life of their communities and society as a whole.

By bringing together the 'supply-side' oriented post-school learning system that existed within the Department of Education and the 'demand-side' that was previously located in the Department of Labour we can address skill deficits and bottlenecks which contribute to the structural constraints to our growth and development path. For the first time the jurisdiction for workplace learning and college based training fall under a single umbrella. This opens up new vistas and the opportunities for the design of 'pipelines' from education to work, as well as the inverse, where workers from both the formal and informal economy can return to study to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications for improved income.

Since the establishment of the DHET last year, we have been stitching together the higher education and training sector and have adopted an inclusive approach to our work. This is because we do not believe that we have all the answers to the challenges we face, nor can we set about on some lone, heroic mission to tackle them. Earlier this year, we brought together our partners in the university sector for an honest engagement on the higher education environment.

The skills base of South Africa in particular with reference to artisans has dramatically decreased in the area of availability of suitably qualified staff to maintain industry and support continual industrial growth. The establishment of the QCTO emphasises the three core competencies within occupational competence of which skills is pertinent. Once the NAMB is fully operationalised it will embark on an advocacy program to brief school leavers of artisan career path and to attempt to eliminate pre-conception and images that currently exist around artisans. Artisan training and NCV programmes within FET colleges should become preferred learning and not alternative learning to the academic routes.

- (c) The results of these macro-interventions cannot be measured in the short-term. What I can commit to, is that we will make progress towards a skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path by
- Increasing artisan production in line with industry needs and the needs of the developmental state;
 - Putting in place measures to improve the trade test pass rate;
 - Increasing the number of learners on artisanal and other immediate programmes;

(d) These interventions will be informed by best practice internationally.