Mrs D van der Walt (DA) to ask the Minister of Education:

Whether her department is investigating the possibility of reopening teacher training colleges; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

REPLY:

Yes, the Department of Education is investigating the possibility of reopening teacher-training colleges as an option among others for expanding the provision of teacher education.

Last year we introduced a service-linked bursary scheme for teacher training at universities (R180 million allocated in 2008 for nearly 5,000 student teachers), and its aims were to train more primary school teachers, more teachers to work in rural schools, and more maths and language teachers. However, we are still short of teachers in these three areas. So one of the options we are considering is the establishment of dedicated units, colleges, or institutions in each province to strengthen this triple need and, additionally, to support provincial and local government integrated development plans.

In the past, teacher training was a provincial competence (it is now a national competence) and colleges were mainly responsible for training primary school teachers. When the decision was taken to close them in the 1990s, colleges were training too many teachers in a fragmented and unco-ordinated system. Moreover, the quality of college training was uneven, some colleges were too expensive for provinces to run (too few pupils per college), and the majority of African students were disadvantaged by being locked into colleges in former homeland areas. At the time, most stakeholders supported their closure. At the same time, most stakeholders supported the associated policy decision to raise the professional status of the teaching profession by locating teacher education and training at universities.
The argument that primary school teachers do not need a university education is part of the call to reopen teacher colleges, and it is an argument that is under review as part of the option to reopen colleges.