

RESPONDING TO Prof. Jonathan Jansen’s Article: *As teachers flee or die, a new, even worse education crisis looms.*

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The title of the article by Jonathan Jansen ***“As teachers flee or die, a new, even worse education crisis looms”*** is not in touch with the feelings of most teachers in South African schools.

It’s safe to say, Professor Jansen admits in his article that he is talking about something he does not fully comprehend when he says; ***“The exact scale of the problem is difficult to quantify...”*** This is very telling and should have guided the Professor’s opinion piece, however he chose to go further and postulate. While at it he casts doubt on the Department’s credibility without facts. He excuses his ignorance of the facts to a claim that some ‘Senior district officials in one province’ have told him that this is ***“in part because of the uneven collection of data across the nine provinces and the suspicion that the data collected from the districts might have been sanitised to put a positive spin on things”***. This is dinner table gossip and not facts.

The DBE reserves a right to respond with facts to set the record straight and assure the people of South Africa that the department under the leadership of Minister Angie Motshekga and her competent team in the sixth administration have a difficult and challenging situation under control. This response seeks to provide the facts that can be verified by the public and scholar alike, not baseless postulations.

Firstly, the Department of Basic Education (***DBE***) ***does not agree that the education system is facing a crisis in teacher supply.*** The DBE ***tracks trends on factors that affect demand, supply and utilisation of educators as part of the human resource planning and provisioning function.*** From the demand side the key factors tracked are growth demand factors such as growth in learner numbers; and the effect of policies relating to learner to educator ratios (LER) and class sizes. Also tracked are the replacement demand factors driven by natural attrition, including attrition brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the supply side key factors tracked include internal supply factors covering appointment and deployment and demographic patterns, and external supply factors focus mainly on new graduates and the pool of returning teachers. Prof Martin Gustafsson (Stellenbosch University

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– Department of Economics) refers to this phenomenon as “churning” to describe the repeated movements in and out of public employment of the same people.

Each year the Department of Higher Education and Training **collects audited data on new teacher graduates from universities and compiles a national report**. The latest national report is the **Trends in Teacher Education 2018 Report**. 28,203 new teachers graduated in 2018, well above the 22,031 target that was set for 2018 by the DHET. The Report also shows that nearly 215,000 students are enrolled for initial teacher education qualifications at the 24 public universities offering teacher education programme.

The number of initial teacher education graduates increased from 10,593 in 2011 to 28,203 in 2018. The DBE is concerned that these graduates are not always absorbed in the public education system. There are a growing number of qualified teachers in the unemployed educator databases both at national and in provinces. **Recent numbers collated as part of preparation for COVID-19 provisioning**, suggest that there may be as much as 50,000 unemployed teachers registered in the databases of unemployed educators maintained at national and in provinces.

Replacement demand resulting from attrition remains the key driver of teacher demand. Teacher attrition has averaged at 4.4% over the financial years 2015/16 - 2019/20. This is comparable with international trends. Nearly 400,000 teachers are employed in public schools. According to PERSAL (June 2020) about 18,000 teachers are between the ages of 60 and 65. 6,493 of these teachers have between 15-30 years’ experience.

In total the nine provincial education departments received 29,667 applications for concessions from teachers with comorbidities. 18,222 Applications have been approved. The appointment of substitute teachers may be considered in some cases.

Utilising substitute teachers to replace teachers who may have to self-isolate due to a comorbidity, illness or age is but one of the options available in the Basic Education Sector. Other options may include using an existing teacher (staff member) to take care of the classes of a teacher that may have to self-isolate due to a comorbidity, illness or age. Utilising Education assistants may be another option. South Africa is experiencing one of the greatest disasters in living memory. **Not a single South African is spared the physical, psychological, emotional or economic impact of the pandemic. The article by Jonathan Jansen is not based on evidence it rather seeks to deepen the fears and uncertainties experienced by ordinary South Africans.**

The Department of Basic Education continues to monitor these trends on a weekly basis, and making decisions that would ensure sustainability, and also ensuring that quality is not compromised in the process.

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Unfounded postulation has no place in supposed academic discourse. Scholars have an established code that requires conclusions and scenarios to be backed by verifiable and peer-reviewable data. This code shields unsuspecting consumers of news and knowledge from being hoodwinked and it provides credibility to the findings of enquirers. When we fail this test and rubbish what peers have established without doubt and transfer our established biases and untested opinions to an unsuspecting reader we risk diminishing our own stature as academics and knowledge peddlers.

We invite Professor Jansen to share with us openly the data he has at his disposal that leads him to the conclusions and suggestions he advances in the article of 13 August 2020 in TimesLive. We reiterate our appeal that in the business of criticism we must be fuelled by a desire to correct and to build and not a desire to confuse, cause panic and derail. We welcome constructive criticism especially from those deemed eminent and distinguished among us, because we trust them and we believe in their bona-fides.

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