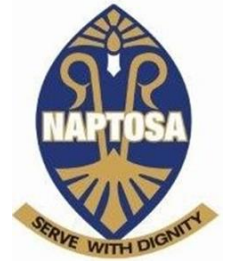


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CONSULTATION: DBE AND TRADE UNIONS

The leadership of NAPTOSA joined the leaders of other recognized education trade unions on Saturday, 8 May 2020, in a consultation meeting with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) on a range of matters reflected below.

Vaccination date for teachers

It is well-known that the vaccination process for frontline health workers has not been concluded. According to the DBE this will, however, not delay the envisaged vaccination roll-out for other public servants, including teachers.

The vaccination process will be preceded by an advocacy campaign to encourage vaccination. A joint union survey previously indicated 48% of members having a positive vaccination view, but with more and improved information available, it is believed that the support has substantially grown since.

The target date for the vaccination process to commence is 18 May 2021 – registration of employees to be overseen by the relevant public service sectors.

Unions support the vaccination roll-out process for teachers, but have called for the inclusion of all education workers in the designated group, including General Workers, Administration personnel, SGB and Private School teachers and education union workers.

Primary school learners returning to normal attendance

The possibility of returning the full complement of primary school learners to normal attendance have been mooted for some time. In the consultation, the DBE tabled a formal proposal to this effect, citing the need to mitigate learning losses.

While the unions indicated an understanding for the spirit of the proposal, they also made it clear to the DBE that it did not eliminate their concerns which they have consistently raised throughout the pandemic period. These include chronically overcrowded primary schools; the reality that social distancing as advocated will not be possible; water supply; classroom shortages; appointment of teachers; the mental health of members and the fears of those with comorbidities. Added to this were the factors of a looming third wave of infections and the fact that winter is upon us.

The Department gave an undertaking that if primary schools were to return to normal attendance, they would ensure strict adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures and an improvement in the supply and delivery of PPEs. It was also indicated that normal attendance would not be enforced in infection hotspots and during possible further infection waves.

Please note that consultation on this matter has not been concluded and that further discussions with labour are envisaged before implementation of the DBE's proposal can be effected.

Procurement of COVID-19 essentials

Unions highlighted the varying quality of masks across the country and even districts as well as the tardy supply thereof. While this was vigorously denied by the Department, they did commit that the provision of masks will be prioritized on a more regular basis especially if the proposal on primary school attendance materializes.

South African School and Administration Management System (SA-SAMS)

The DBE gave an update on the problems relating to the late release of the SA-SAMS patch. Various concerns were tabled around the issue and the Department was requested to ensure that they are better prepared to deal with changes to the system as will probably be required with the expected changes to the ATP's.

The difference between CEMIS and SA-SAMS was briefly highlighted especially the shortcomings of CEMIS with regard to school management components.

The next meeting will take a report on the SA-SAMS updating project.

NSC examination and timetable

Although the Department did not share the actual timetable, the following main dates were nevertheless indicated:

- Exams will commence on 1 November and run for 6 weeks to 7 December 2021.
- Marking will commence on 8 December until 22 December 2021.
- The Minister will release results on 14 January 2022.

Unions noted the dates, but raised concerns that possible COVID disruptions have not been factored in.

As indicated, further consultation meetings with the Department are envisaged. Members will be kept abreast of developments.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR