

Ministry to boost e-learning

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The higher education ministry aims to expand and strengthen e-learning. Photo: Reuters

THE Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation aims to expand and strengthen e-learning in this financial year.

While tabling the budget on Monday, minister Itah Kandji-Murangi said the ministry plans to audit programmes at higher education institutions like the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust) and the University of Namibia (Unam) to transform and align the curricula to ensure it is relevant and responds to demand.

Kandji-Murangi said they also want to accelerate special postgraduate programmes, and develop and introduce specialised postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes for upskilling in new technologies and innovations.

Nust was allocated N\$503 million and Unam N\$900 million during this financial year.

Earlier this month, the minister said the government has made N\$9,4 million available for internet connectivity at institutions of higher learning.

The minister was speaking at the Covid-19 communication centre on the efforts the government was making in response to new education policies as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Funds would also cover server upgrades at Nust and Unam.

Namibia has 16 higher education institutions – two of which are public universities.

There are currently 67 000 students at higher education institutions in the country, of whom 67% are females.

More than half of these students are studying at Unam (28 323) and Nust (12 500).

The International University of Management (IUM), a private university, has 10 171 students.

About 21% of these students are enrolled in the science, technology, engineering and mathematical fields. Master's and doctoral degrees account for only 3,7% of its total enrollment.

NSFAF

Meanwhile, the ministry has allocated N\$1,2 billion to the Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF).

According to her, NSFAF has funded 27 385 students at a cost of N\$1 076 billion, and 14 783 new students at a cost of N\$496 million for 2019/2020.

“The demand for student funding is increasing rapidly, therefore new strategies are required to ensure the sustainability of the NSFAF. The ministry has undertaken, with the NSFAF board, to reform NSFAF processes, systems and policy,” she said.

Kandji-Murangi said this has led to the consolidation of a database of beneficiaries/debtors, the development of a new student funding and debt recovery policy and a sustainability model to help diversify and increase NSFAF's revenue base.

She said the process of student debt recovery has begun.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Despite macroeconomic challenges, the minister said they have made good progress with the implementation of a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) transformation and expansion strategy through the Namibia Training Authority.

She said the implementation of the strategy is centred around increased access to TVET by expanding existing vocational training centres and constructing new ones in regions without such centres.

The servicing of and earthworks for training centres at Nkurenkuru, Kunene and Keetmanshoop were concluded last year.

The Central Procurement Board (CPB) is expected to appoint contractors this financial year.

The minister said training centres at Gobabis, Zambezi, Okakarara, Valombola and Nakayale are currently being upgraded and are scheduled to be completed by early 2021.

The Kai//Ganaxab Youth Skills Training Centre (Hardap) will be upgraded and converted to a fully fledged VTC.

The ministry has allocated N\$425 million to the Namibian Training Authority.