

Challenges facing the education system

Call to action for free, compulsory & quality education

The YCL National Committee has resolved on the need to defend our indigenous languages which are continuously being annihilated by English. There is a false impression imprinted on the minds of our parents that educated children are those who speak in English. This has resulted into most schools, including public schools, to introduce the teaching of various subjects in English.

We call on the DOE to move with speed with regards to the 2005 Language Policy as a means to defend and protect indigenous languages. We firmly believe that teaching children in their mother tongue at an early age enhances their capacity to learn. In this regard, we also call on Universities to encourage the training of teachers who will teach in indigenous languages. We reject the assumption that English is primary, and that all other languages should be subordinated to this language, we are calling for all languages should be treated equally.

The YCL recognizes History as an important, but yet sensitive lesson in our country. There is a need to connect our past with the current generation through education. Young people who are disconnected with their History will not know where they come from and may not defend a prosperous future. We reject totally a creeping notion that Apartheid was defeated through a miracle, and to that extent we demand that part of the history lessons should be linked to the struggles that led to the attainment of our democratic dispensation.

We are also worried about the quality of training of teachers in the History subject, and the collapse of the SA History Project in the DOE. We applaud efforts to make history lessons and information available online, but not all SA communities are online. The DOE

and other government institutions should ensure that they take forward the SA History Project.

We believe that in as much as Mathematics and Science are significant, the teaching of History should be placed in the same level and that sensitivity should apply in its application. This is also linked to our call for the teaching of dialectical and historical materialism (critical thinking and knowledge transmission).

The collapse of Colleges of Education, although well intended initially, had grave and severe consequences on the training of teachers. In the first instance, the Colleges of Education provided free access to teacher training. This enabled many young South Africans to train as teachers. The relegation of teacher edu-

The absence of teacher training provisions in the NCS is a recipe for disaster

cation to universities, in our view, have resulted in fewer teachers being able to access training programmes.

We welcome the introduction of Teacher Training Bursaries, and encourage young people to take advantage of this. We are further of the view that lower teacher wages are a cause for concern and have an impact on the quality of teaching in our schools. We note the intention of the DOE to recruit teachers from foreign countries, however, we believe that more money should be invested in the education of local teachers and the improvement of their working conditions.

We are appalled by the absence of training and retraining of teachers in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), and that this is an invitation for a disaster. The delay of the introduction of

NCS in Gr.11—Gr.12 and the high failure rates in the latter can be attributed to lack of retraining.

In the same regard, we reiterate our call for quality control and honest peer assessment amongst teachers on their performance appraisals. We further call on some level of accountability on the part of teachers. The teaching profession is the most important and profound one, thus parents subject their children to the leadership and guidance of their teachers. In the same regard, we also call on the DOE to provide incentives for good and quality teaching.

We reiterate our call for the closure of Shebeens which are located next to schools as this remains one of the most hindrances to learning and teaching. In this regard, we will be convening a Summit as part of our Youth Month programme which will focus on shebeens located next to schools, and generally the abuse of alcohol and drugs by school children. We demand maximum discipline in our schools.

We are concerned with the crises that continues to engulf the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) in the DOE. We remain convicted to the ideal that adult literacy is a right, and that illiterate parents should continue to access education which they were deprived by the Apartheid education system. We call on government to announce plans and resources to end adult illiteracy immediately, and ensure that there is capacity at the level of government.

We believe that there is a need for “mass education campaign” to wipe out adult illiteracy, which should involve the National Youth Service, churches, schools, universities and every space available to ensure that our parents are taught how to read and write. This failure by our government, 13 years down the line, cannot be tolerated.

The YCL is concerned that although



at a national level Education is the highest expenditure from the national coffers, some provinces tend to redirect these resources to other expenditures of less significance than education. Some Premiers and Provincial Treasuries have address different priorities as compared to national priorities, and they therefore thwart the expenditure to their own provincial imperatives and compromise education.

As we approach the ANC policy conference, we are calling for the review of the need for Education MEC's. And advocating for the policy that will give more powers to the national minister to determine national priorities and imperatives, and powers to intervene at all levels. This will guarantee uniformity and standardization.

Related to the above is the review of powers bestowed to provincial treasuries in relation to budgeting. Our view is that in the process of budgeting national priorities must supersede provincial ones, so that provincial targets respond to national targets.

As it relates to universities and FET colleges, we are concerned that these institutions are a law unto themselves, having powers to exclude financially and academically, unilaterally increasing fees and using their discretion on the determination of national skills priorities. We insist that academic freedom does not constitute small states, where Vice Chancellors are pseudo presidents and decide willy-nilly on who should study in these institutions (financially) and what they should study. Some of

these Apartheid characteristics and features have resulted in absolutely no change on the education system, with some universities remaining lily-white with better infrastructure whilst black institutions remain poor and not resourced.

We call on the DOE to introduce a regulatory framework for both further and higher education. There should be a baseline and a tuition capping on all institutions of higher learning and an in-

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creased funding so that access to higher education would not be a privilege for those from stable background.

We are in essence calling for an increased state role and thus limited Institutional autonomy on certain key determinations. Such a state intervention to higher learning must include directing absorption levels on certain national skills priority areas that JIPSA is trying to address.

The fact that the publishing of textbooks have been relegated to the whims of the markets is a cause for concern. In most instances, delivery of these textbooks is not done in time, and thus learners get compromised. We are also worried that as a result of this, most learners are still subjected to the untransformed Apartheid education as a makeshift to fill the gap created by pri-

vate publishers.

We are calling for the recapitalization of the distribution of Learner Support Material to the state; in this regard we are calling for the creation of government warehouses in all provinces which will be responsible for the production and distribution of learner support materials as an urgent priority.

Continuing with the struggle for Transformation

As the YCL, we are determined to continue with our demand for Free, Compulsory Quality Public Education in 2008. We will continue with mass action, mobilisation of learners, teachers and communities for this ideal demand. In this regard, we want to place the following as a minimum report card that the Minister of Education should be assessed on, without any further delay:

- Scrapping school fees in all schools by 2008. We welcome all efforts made by the DOE to ensure that the poor have access to education through the introduction of no-fee schools policy. However, most of these schools, in practice, have experienced problems in accessing these funds due to resource diversion and poor administrative capacity by provinces;

- The introduction of a standard and affordable school uniform in all schools;

- The allocation of budget to schools to manage vegetable gardens;

- The building of classrooms and fixing of existing ones should be a priority in order to realise the call by the President of the country in 2004.

- The institution of security in schools to halt murders, crimes and other ills in schools;

- Introduction of working libraries, sports facilities and Science and Computer Labs in all schools;

- The provision of teachers where they are short;

- Provision of transport for all learners traveling more than 1 kilometer to school;

- Institution of good governance in Schools through properly trained principals; and

- Provision of Learner Support Materials to Learners on time at all schools.

- We also call on the Department of Education to scrap the financing of private schools and redirect this financing to public schools. We also call on the Minister to train Student Governing Bodies (SGB) for better delivery and governance.