

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA welcomes deployment of over 200 000 assistant teachers and calls for longer period
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) welcomes the deployment of over 200 000 assistant teachers across South Africa in an attempt to ease educators' workload and create jobs for young people.

The assistant teachers will be appointed for six months with a stipend of R4 000 and R30 data. The Department of Basic Education is aware of the massive shortage of educators, resulting on an increased workload on educators with an extremely unhealthy educator-learner ratio. Recent research revealed that the country has a shortfall of some 46 000 educators. This is aggravated by the fact that between 18 000 and 22 000 educators are leaving the profession annually owing to retirement and other factors. Classroom overcrowding and unconducive working conditions remain a reality of many educators, leaving many of them demotivated and disillusioned. The Department needs a long-term solution as the quick fix through employment of assistant teachers will not address challenges faced by the teachers and the Department.

The challenge with the assistant teachers programme is that young people are deployed for an extremely short period and need to be trained and mentored by already overworked educators. By the time they grasp some of what is expected of them, their term ends. Consequently, educators will have the further responsibility for mentoring assistant teachers who are then not readily available to plug the gap.

The deployment of assistant teachers can, however, not replace the need to appoint professional and qualified educators. The PSA is concerned about the impact of the initiative, It cannot simply be about giving young people the opportunity to collect R4 000 per month for six months and then go back to being unemployed. Any initiative for the employment of young people must be linked to skills development, making them more employable beyond that particular endeavour. The assistant teachers programme unfortunately falls short in this regard.

The PSA therefore calls for the assistant teachers programme to be extended to 36 months. Participants should also be offered bursaries to study for a teaching qualification or those who are already studying a towards a teaching diploma should ne considered, instead of appointing persons without an interest in teaching. By the time the young participants complete the assistant teacher programme, they will thus also have a teaching qualification, with accumulated experience in schools. This approach will assist in alleviating youth employment and will address the shortage of educators.

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