

Business Day

Teachers first up in presidential inquiry on public sector salaries

by [Karl Gernetzky](#), 12 March 2015

A PRESIDENTIAL review of public-sector salaries and conditions of service is now officially under way with a call for submissions, amid high expectations that it will recommend improving conditions of service for teachers.

However, even after smoothing over the technical hurdles that caused previous delays, the inquiry is expected to take at least two years.

The commission was announced by President Jacob Zuma during his state of the nation address in 2013.

Its mandate is to investigate the appropriateness of the remuneration and conditions of service provided by the state to all its employees, but with teachers as a priority.

Last April's deadline for the commission to complete its work was missed.

The commission's head, former chief justice Sandile Ngcobo, said on Wednesday he would request both an extension of the time frame for the inquiry as well as additional members from key statutory bodies.

These would be sought as part of a bid to complete a mandate that includes probing the value and efficiency of public services, and the fairness of pay for key personnel such as teachers, while creating a basis for "an atmosphere that is conducive to sound labour relations".

The original time frame of eight months was impractical given the scope of the inquiry, said Judge Ngcobo.

Difficulties were experienced in securing staff and service providers and adapting the time frame of the inquiry to processes for securing such services through the Department of Public Service and Administration, he said.

A memorandum had been signed with that department delegating some powers to the commission, Judge Ngcobo said. Along with a request for a longer time frame, the commission would also request that Mr Zuma appoint senior officials from the Public Service Commission and the Financial and Fiscal Commission as ex officio members.

"Both are involved in the kind of work that falls within the investigative mandate of the committee," he said.

The start of the commission was marked on Wednesday by a briefing for interested parties, primarily in the education sector, which will be the first sector to be examined in a wide-ranging probe across all state-owned entities and departments.

However, with its early focus on conditions and services for teachers, there will be no separate early report as this could ultimately cause inconsistencies in the final report.

The commission is now seeking submissions on education by the end of June, with the intention of publishing a provisional report some time next year, which will then be subjected to public comment and scrutiny.

The commencement of the inquiry comes as public servants, including teachers, are seeking a wage increase from the state. Teachers' influence is underlined by the fact the lead negotiators for labour are from the two largest teaching unions.

Both South African Democratic Teachers' Union general secretary Mugwena Maluleke and National Professional Teachers Organisation of SA president Basil Manuel have said the inquiry will not affect the current negotiations.

Judge Ngcobo said on Wednesday the review would aim not to undermine collective bargaining, although it was up to others to ensure and point out any concerns. "Recommendations will be there to assist the process of bargaining," he said.

South African Teachers Union CEO Chris Klopper said the union's submissions would be informed by the belief that in 2008, a "golden opportunity" had been missed to entrench "career-pathing", when occupation-specific dispensations were introduced.

Both improvements in the quality of teachers and their ability to progress beyond starting salary levels could be implemented in a "much more systematic and rational manner".

Gauteng education MEC Panyaza Lesufi said the province was seeking to ensure a single submission from all interested parties, including unions, which would have the benefit of expediting the process.

Mr Lesufi also said that concerns of the department included the continual loss of skilled and committed teachers to private schools, leading to shortages at township schools, as well as the shortage of specialist skills in areas such as early childhood development.

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