

*Business Day* 29 February 2008

## Five-year, R6bn literacy drive begins with training of trainers

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Education Minister Naledi Pandor officially launched the government's R6,1bn, five-year mass literacy campaign, called Kha Ri Gude, last night.

When classes begin on April 14 it will be the culmination of work begun in 2005 when Pandor established a ministerial committee on literacy after publicly admitting that South Africa had had little success in eradicating illiteracy, despite this being a government goal since 1994.

This weekend the "master trainers" would be trained, and the training programme planned, said Gugu Ndebele, the national education department's deputy director-general of social and school enrichment.

The master trainers will go on to train 20 000 more trainers and the goal of the campaign is to teach 4,7-million functionally illiterate people by 2012.

"There's enough time. Everyone knows what they have to do ... (and) the materials are ready," said Prof Veronica MacKay, a literacy expert at the University of SA (Unisa) who has been seconded to the department to run the programme with two others.

The most intense implementation is set for 2009-11, during which it is hoped 3,6-million people will be taught basic literacy and numeracy in their mother tongue and some economic "language", according to the operational plan approved by the cabinet last August.

This will be overseen by an interministerial committee that is chaired by Pandor.

The project has not been without controversy. In November last year Prof John Aitchison, a literacy expert at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who was also seconded to the department, resigned after the department initially gave only five days' turnaround time for the submission of tender documents for the administration of the programme. The turnaround time was extended to 12 days.

Education department director-general Duncan Hindle said the short time was because the department was under pressure to sign on a service provider as soon as possible.

Aitchison has since retired. His secondment to the department was to have expired on December 9 last year.

The tender had been awarded to a company called SAB&T, a South African chartered accounting and "business innovation" company, said Ndebele.

Aitchison said he had no idea whether the tender process had been compromised, but he felt it was done "in bad faith" because the three people seconded to the department to run the

programme – Aitchison, MacKay and South African Council for the Blind director Obert Maghuve – were not told of it, it was hastily done, and the tender briefing did not mention the operational plan the three had drawn up.

The government wants to use the campaign to meet its 2000 World Education Forum promise to reduce illiteracy by 50% by 2015, and to have the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation declare SA a territory free of illiteracy.