

January 2006

BOFESETE POSITION ON WORKING RELATIONS WITH MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

BOFESETE is a legally registered organisation of Secondary school teachers. Its aim is to promote teachers' welfare (living and working conditions) and provide a harmonious link between Ministry of Education (MOE) and teachers as implementers of the curriculum. BOFESETE is committed to, and conscious of the need and essence of its contributory role in national development. It hence considers its relationship with the MOE very important.

1. Selective Consultation

We would like to acknowledge that there are times when BOFESETE is genuinely consulted by the MOE. Most of the times the MOE officials respond to our queries in meetings that we have asked for purposes of clarification especially when there is talk of forthcoming reforms. BOFESETE understands consultation as asking for someone's view in a discussion. This is done in an initial stage so as to embrace as many ideas as possible. This is also meant to minimize differences. As stakeholders in education, we feel we should be consulted on matters that are likely affect policy or education in general. Examples include the Double Shift programme; Re-introduction of School fees; Increase of Class Sizes; Transfer Policy; Review of Education documents like Education Act, etc. A problem analysis approach is used to determine partners and stakeholders for purposes of knowing whom, when, why and how to consult. Consultation is different from informing as the latter does not solicit views or input.

2. Media relations

BOFESETE uses the media to disseminate information to its membership and the general public. The organisation subscribes to constitutional provision of freedom of expression and conscience. It also embraces the vision 2016 pillar of a transparent nation. Many scenarios come into play when it comes to communicating with the media. One of the scenarios is that BOFESETE usually responds to media after MOE officials have made particular statements which may also need us to respond and clarify our position. We also make media statements and comments before and after our congresses and conferences, following resolutions. The media are news hound in their own right and they will always pick up news from the public or their sources. In conclusion, BOFESETE is a member of Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Botswana Chapter and therefore subscribes to its principles.

3. Professionalism / Work Ethics

BOFESETE abide to professional ethics. It encourages its membership to be professional at all times. This is reiterated at our congresses and conferences, as well as during school and regional visits. BOFESETE has always condemned

unprofessional conduct by its membership, especially intimate relationship between teachers and students; absence without leave, drunkardness, etc. BOFESETE has never tolerated unethical behaviour and it's a role it will continue to do. We however expect that natural justice has to be upheld when such cases are investigated.

4. Political activities and writing in newspapers by Teachers

BOFESETE is involved with teacher politics. It subscribes to Teaching Service Act, Section 21 which prohibits publication of political and administrative matters, "but such teacher may publish in his own name other matters relating to subjects of professional or general interest". We hope the MOE officials are aware that any subject can be of a "political nature" whilst at the same time it is a matter of "professional or general interest" to a teacher. Teachers are entitled to talk about matters affecting their welfare as well as those of professional interest to them. If they are not allowed, the restriction would not be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society as the constitution requires. If the MOE officials victimizes teachers for writing in the media, they may start writing anonymously and this would be a sad dawn on democracy.

In his State of the Nation address to the 1st Session of the 9th Parliament, "Renewed Responsibility", 8th October, 2004, President Festus Mogae said the Government 'faces unfinished business in the context of our efforts to build a more tolerant, united and just nation'. Some MOE officials are not tolerant and tend to personalize national issues. At the same address, the President called for "renewed partnership among all Batswana". This explains why we asked for this meeting.

BOFESETE has a duty to issue opinions on Government policies that affect teacher welfare, whether they be a subject of political debate, discussion or not.

5. Social Responsibilities

BOFESETE has heeded President Festus Mogae call to fight the national pandemic of HIV and AIDS. Though with limited resources, BOFESETE has been on the war path against the pandemic as an attempt to achieve the national call. BOFESETE Gender wing has since taken up the responsibility and it is running workshops, attending seminars and meetings as well as encouraging teachers to test so as to know their status. In all our congresses and conferences, the Tebelopele Testing and Counselling division has been invited to set up their stall.

BOFESETE has also donated generously to some disadvantaged members of the society. We have donated some foodstuff, bedding, clothing, money, etc in Francistown, Palapye, Maun, Lobatse to mention but a few.

This has been done as a humanitarian and socially responsible activity and a way of complementing what the government is also doing. Resources permitting, we would like to undertake projects that give our recipients sustainable and life long skills for self reliance. This is also what our members inculcate in students in their respective schools through various clubs. We hope the MOE of education will also support us in such endeavours.

6. Conclusion

Teachers have long raised certain issues and MOE officials do not seem committed to resolving them. Teachers are therefore aggrieved and are becoming hopeless and therefore seeking alternative ways of getting help. Some members are already calling for international intervention from sister organizations as a way of seeking further assistance. The issue of overtime allowance is quite an old one. Parallel progression had to be resolved by the courts of law after the MOE refused to listen to teachers' advice. Other controversial reforms include the Scarce Skills, Leave Encashment, etc.

As BOFESETE, we hope this position will help clarify our mandate and ideology. We hope the MOE will acknowledge our position and possibly respond in writing. We remain committed to the teaching profession.

BOFESETE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE