

NSFAS expands access to higher education

Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande says tremendous progress has been made in making higher education more accessible to the poor through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) over the years.



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The Minister was briefing media on Thursday, in Pretoria, on Higher Education and Training Sector's state of readiness and on options available to young people seeking opportunities for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) in 2017.

He said NSFAS has funded over 1.7 million students since 1994. In 2016, NSFAS supported approximately 480,000 poor undergraduate students to access universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

NSFAS also disbursed loans and bursaries totalling R14 billion to students in 2016.

During the Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, government announced that it will provide an additional R9 billion for NSFAS over the period ahead, raising its funding by over 18% to universities over the next three years to assist poor and missing middle students.

This year, Minister Nzimande said NSFAS will be funding 205,000 first time entering and continuing eligible students at universities and 200,000 students at TVET colleges in 2017 by providing student loans and bursaries totalling R15.2 billion.

He also said government will pay the fee increase, capped at 8%, for all qualifying registered students with a gross combined family income up to R600,000 per annum in 2017.

“This is a grant, which covers the increases for tuition fees and university or college-managed accommodation, and will not have to be repaid by qualifying students.

“This will benefit more than 75% of university and TVET college students, and in some institutions, more than 90% of students.”

He said NSFAS qualifying students will not pay any registration or upfront fees in 2017, as government has made arrangements through NSFAS to pay the registration fees for all funded students as an upfront payment to universities and TVET colleges in January each year.

All NSFAS qualifying students, who were registered in 2016, and were successful in their studies, but who have accumulated historical student debt with institutions of higher education, will be allowed to register in 2017.

Interventions for the missing middle

The Minister has requested universities to manage student debt through fair and transparent debt management policies in order to ensure that outstanding student debt is recovered over a reasonable period.

He said the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme model, which is aimed at assisting the missing middle, will be piloted at six universities and one TVET college.

The pilot will fund the studies of approximately 1,500 students studying in a number of general formative degrees as well as seven professional qualifications and one artisan qualification for the duration of their studies.

“It is also important to note that in addition to the money that NSFAS has received from the funds voted by Parliament, the National Skills Fund (NSF) makes further annual allocations aimed at funding the full cost of study towards critical skills programmes that are most needed for the growth and development of the economy.

“NSFAS has been allocated over R718 million for full bursaries for scarce and critical skills for the current year from the NSF.

“This funding is made available through the financial aid offices at institutions, and students wishing to make use of these bursaries are advised to enrol for critical skills study programmes which include science, commerce, health sciences and engineering.”

He also said NSFAS has earmarked R76.6 million in the 2017 academic year to provide financial aid to disabled students in universities.