

Abolition of NSFAS means tests for students on social grants

By [Linda Ensor](#)

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Matriculants accepted into institutions of higher learning who are recipients of social grants will not be subjected to a means test in order to qualify for financial aid from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini announced on Monday, 12 December 2016.



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The minister's announcement confirms what NSFAS project manager Xolani Gobela said at a social development youth camp in Kimberley last week.

This would ensure that learners from poor and vulnerable families had access to funding so that they could further their studies without social grant income being an obstacle, Dlamini said.

"This collaboration (between the departments of social development and basic education with the NSFAS) is aligned to the protocol agreement on linking social protection administrative data systems for poor and vulnerable learners," the minister said.

"The aim is to track, locate and improve the wellbeing of poor and vulnerable learners with a host of social protection services.

"This simply means that support and money follows the learner; secondly, few vulnerable and poor learners apply for financial assistance.

"We are trying to make sure that our existing programmes speak to each other for the better delivery of services," Dlamini said in a briefing on the work of the social services cluster of government departments.

She reported that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) had noted the recent decision by some universities, including the University of the Witwatersrand and University of Stellenbosch, to increase fees within the 8% capped fee adjustments for 2017.

"Based on the government subsidy funding model for universities, the department has calculated that some institutions may experience a shortfall in income in the 2017 academic year due to the 0% fee adjustment in 2016 and the compounded effect of inflation.

"Therefore, all affected institutions are faced with the task of implementing cost-cutting measures to ensure their sustainability. This is an interim measure as a longer-term solution to higher education funding is still being sought," Dlamini said.

"Although NSFAS has done much to deal with the problem of funding to support poor students, the remaining challenge is that working- and middle-class students cannot be fully funded.

"Substantial work has been done by the Department of Higher Education and Training since the review of NSFAS in 2010, culminating in the proposal of the Ikusasa Student Financial Aid Programme (ISFAP)."

Dlamini said the ISFAP model would be piloted at six universities and one technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college in 2017.

The pilot would fund the studies of about 2,000 students for the duration of their studies.

The lessons learnt from this pilot, the comments received from the public consultation process, the results of the feasibility study and the recommendations of the Presidential Fees Commission, would feed into the development of the final model.

Source: BDpro