

Policy for regulation of university fees underway

Higher Education, Science and Innovation Minister Blade Nzimande says the development of a policy framework for the regulation of university fees is underway to ensure that fees are kept at affordable levels for all families that need assistance.



Source: © Brian Jackson – 123RF.com

"These efforts in the long-term aim to ensure that going forward all students are able to access some form of financial support for their university studies. However, without substantial additional funding being available in the sector, student debt will continue to be a problem," Nzimande said.

The Minister was speaking during a hybrid National Elective Conference of the South African Union of Students (SAUS) on Sunday.

The 8th elective conference is being held at the University of Venda, under the theme 'Dismantling all barriers besetting university entry and placing SAUS at the centre of creating a sustainable post-school education and training sector'.

Addressing the conference, Nzimande said concerns have been raised about withholding academic records of students

who have outstanding fees by institutions, and he has had several engagements with universities regarding the matter.

"All institutions have agreed to provide a certificate of completion to potential employers where students have met all the requirements for graduation, but still have university debt. Academic transcripts are also provided by institutions where they are required," Nzimande said.

However, Nzimande said he has learnt that there are students who are still unable to access their academic records, and the department is constantly engaging with Registrars of institutions where such cases are brought to the attention of the department.

"Following a meeting that I had with South African Union of Students (SAUS) earlier this year, Universities South Africa (USAf) has initiated a process to work towards a system-wide approach to the issue of student transcripts and certificates and outstanding fees. I am aware that USAf has started this process and hopes to conclude it soon."

Student Housing Infrastructure Programme

On student accommodation, the Minister said the department, together with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), has established a Student Housing Infrastructure Programme (SHIP) to centrally facilitate the construction of student accommodation.

"Our aim is to address the shortage of student housing and accelerate the development of at least 300,000 beds over a 10-year period, and we are working towards delivering even more than this," the Minister said.

The University of Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela University, University of North West and University of Western Cape, Sefako Makgatho University, and University of Limpopo are the first beneficiaries of SHIP Phase 1 developments.

Phase 1 SHIP developments enabled an investment of about R3.5 billion, including the DBSA commitment of R1.6 million debt funding for 12,000 student beds. Phase 2 SHIP developments comprise of about 24,000 student beds of 12 institutions including six universities.

"I recently launched the Alice Student Village at the University of Fort Hare, and was proud to see the fruits of this work," the Minister said.

While focus is on development of student housing, the Minister said the department continues to pay attention to the existing infrastructure maintenance, noting that some of the institutions, especially in the most disadvantaged areas, have facilities that have not been maintained and are in poor condition.

New Gauteng universities underway

Meanwhile, the Minister has confirmed that plans are underway for the establishment of two new universities in Gauteng, as announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the State of the Nation address in February 2020.

"A steering committee to oversee the feasibility study has been put in place and is due to be completed next year. The University of Science and Innovation will be established at Ekurhuleni, the only metro without a university," Nzimande said.