



MEDIA STATEMENT

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, DR BLADE NZIMANDE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE NSFAS 2020 APPLICATIONS OFFICIAL OPENING HELD AT THE GCIS TSHEDIMOSSETSO HOUSE, PRETORIA

Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Mr Buti Manamela;
Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Mr Gwebs Qonde;

NSFAS Administrator, Dr Randall Carolissen;

DDGs of the Department of Higher Education and Training;

NSFAS Executive and Staff;

Officials from the Department of Higher Education and Training;

Student leadership;

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest condolences to the family of Uyinene Mrwetyana, the young UCT student, who was so brutally taken from us last week. We trust that the justice system will run its course and ensure those responsible face the full might of the law.

We add our voice to the necessity for societal mobilisation to defeat the scourge of gender-based violence. As a department we are engaging all stakeholders to improve campus security. We are working with the Ministerial Task Team appointed to advise me on issues of sexual harassment and gender-based violence and harm at universities, which has commenced its work.

Now, onto the reason we are here... it is with great pleasure that I am able to announce that the 2020 National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Online applications for funding were opened yesterday, 1 September 2019.

The 2020 application cycle will run for a period of three months, with the closing date being 30 November 2019 at midnight.

As you know, I have decided to approve a second phase of Administration from August 2019 to August 2020. Dr Randall Carolissen has agreed to continue as the administrator to fulfil the responsibilities of management, governance and administration of NSFAS during this period, and the terms of reference for the second phase are outlined in Government Gazette No. 42662.

Despite a number of areas that require improvements in the management of NSFAS and the student funding system, Dr Carolissen has done a tremendous job in improving the functionality of the system. I wish to thank Dr Carolissen for agreeing to continue working in this critical role, and I wish him and his team well in undertaking their responsibilities.

NSFAS provides funding for students from poor and working-class backgrounds in TVET colleges and universities. University NSFAS-qualifying students are funded for first undergraduate qualifications. So far this year, NSFAS has funded nearly 600 000 students at TVET colleges and universities. It should be noted that Term 2 and Term 3 registrations are ongoing. In 2019 NSFAS funded close to 45% of the undergraduate student population at our public universities.

NSFAS funding is key to government's support for students in higher education and training. We know that adequate funding and support are crucial factors in assisting students to succeed in their studies, and the support is provided specifically to ensure students have access to enable success in their studies. Our own cohort studies in the Department of Higher Education and Training have shown that NSFAS students, on average, perform significantly better than students in the overall population.

It is gratifying to note that comparing the 2008 cohort of university students who received NSFAS funding with the general cohort of undergraduate students starting in that year, the NSFAS cohort outperformed the national cohort by more than 10% (including contact and distance students). The throughput rate of the 2008 NSFAS cohort is 68.9%, while the general cohort is 58%. This is contrary to some of the public discourse and shows that with financial support, students from economically disadvantaged households can succeed. I am proud that we are making a critical difference in the lives of young people from poor and working-class backgrounds.

We are committed to ensuring that our student funding system is effectively managed and implemented across universities and TVET colleges and that students are able to fully access the funding that government has made available.

Government has set aside more than R80 billion for the next three years to ensure that prospective students from poor and working-class families with a combined household income of R350 000 per annum have access to higher education and training. This is a massive investment in student support and an important policy of government to support and transform our higher education and training system and society. The DHET Bursary scheme providing fully-subsidised fee free higher education and training to students from poor and working-class backgrounds is being phased in from 2018 over a period of five years.

NSFAS Qualifying Criteria & Eligibility

To be eligible for NSFAS funding for university and TVET college studies, applicants should meet the following criteria:

1. Be a South African citizen;
2. Intend to enroll at any of the 26 public universities; or 50 TVET colleges in 2020;
3. Come from a family with a combined annual household income of not more than R350 000 per annum.
4. If you are a student with a disability and come from a family with an income of not more than R600 000 per annum.
5. Agree to the terms and conditions of the NSFAS grant or bursary awarded.

Students must note that to qualify for NSFAS funding they must obtain a place to study at a public TVET college or university. This means they must be admitted and actually register for a funded qualification for the 2020 academic year. NSFAS assesses the financial eligibility of a student, while institutions are responsible for making admissions decisions.

I urge all aspiring students to ensure that while they apply for funding to NSFAS, they have also submitted the necessary applications to universities and TVET colleges. It is important that potential students obtain a place to study at a qualifying institution in order to qualify for NSFAS funding. You can get more information from the DHET career services hotline, Khetha.

Students who are currently funded for 2019 by NSFAS are not required to re-apply for 2020 funding. NSFAS will continue to fund these students provided they meet the NSFAS progression criteria. If you applied for NSFAS funding earlier but were not awarded NSFAS funding, you will be required to apply again for 2020.

We are aware of about 20 000 students in 2019 who have not yet received their NSFAS bursaries because they have not completed the forms or provided the correct documentation. Whilst there have been some challenges with regards to disbursements in some cases, appeals are being processed more effectively, and NSFAS has committed to pay close attention to all verification and disbursement processes. We expect that improvements will continue to be made to NSFAS business processes, both at the entity itself, and at TVET colleges and universities.

In the two months, I will also be appointing a Ministerial task team to review the business processes and functionality of NSFAS in order to ensure that this bursary scheme functions optimally for the long-term future. The 2020 application process provides NSFAS applicants with a convenient, efficient, effective and transparent application process using electronic or e-governance platforms. This involves using the application of ICT for delivering NSFAS application services. Further details are in the media statement.

In closing, I would like to urge young people aspiring to attend our public TVET colleges and universities from 2020 to utilise the online applications system and other

access points, to apply on time for funding, to ensure that decisions can be made timeously, and to utilise the toll-free NSFAS number for queries. I wish all applicants the best of luck.

Once again, I would like to reiterate my commitment and that of my Department to work closely with the NSFAS Administrator and the team at NSFAS as well as with all our public universities and TVET colleges to improve the effectiveness of our student funding system. This is to build an excellent system for the future, one that ensures that students from poor and working-class backgrounds are able to access higher education and training and achieve their qualifications with the best possible support available to them.

I would like to thank the Department of Basic Education for allowing NSFAS to interface with high schools, and to make use of the teacher centres across the country. We thank Vodacom Foundation and MTN Foundation for zero-rating the NSFAS website so that learners applying for funding using these two networks are not charge any data costs. This is a much appreciated effort from the sector and we think it will go a long way in making a difference.

I would like to thank the leadership of NSFAS and TVET colleges and universities and the many people working at universities and colleges to support students to succeed. Your hard work is critical to the success of students; our future leaders. I would also like to thank the student leadership of our institutions and national organisations for their support to students and to NSFAS and institutions. Together we can make this work!

I thank you