



higher education
& training
Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Department of Higher Education and Training

Guidelines for the

Department of Higher Education and Training

Bursary Scheme for Students at Public Universities

2020

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Abbreviations

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
FAO	Financial Aid Office
FTEN	First Time Entry
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NYDA	National Youth Development Agency
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PQM	Programme Qualification Mix
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency

Glossary of Terms

Approved funded university programmes

Approved funded programmes at public universities are undergraduate whole qualifications. A funded undergraduate programme is one that has been accredited by the Council on Higher Education, approved by the Department for inclusion into the university's Programme Qualifications Mix, and may be offered by the university provided that it is registered on the National Qualifications Framework by the South African Qualifications Authority.

Bursary: financial support awarded to a student in need that does not need to be repaid, but has other conditions attached.

Combined gross family income: a measure of the combined income before taxes of parents/spouses and/or legal guardian **who earns** income, both from the formal and informal sector (e.g., salaries and wages, grant, pension or other sources of income including business and rental income).

DHET Bursary Scheme: financial aid programme that provides fully-subsidised funding for poor and working class students at public universities.

First-time entry (FTEN) students: student who is entering a public university or college for the first time, and has not previously studied at that institutional type.

Full cost of study: means the total cost of study for a student arising from tuition fees, accommodation and subsistence, and travel related to formal teaching and learning activities, as determined by the criteria contained in these Guidelines and subject to limitations.

Funding cap: the maximum award size for an annual award to continuing university students who had entered the system prior to 2018, and is determined and set annually by NSFAS.

Grant: means financial support awarded to a student in need that does not need to be repaid and has no service conditions attached.

NSFAS Bursary Agreement (NBA): written agreement between the student and NSFAS

Returning students: students who are continuing with their studies from a prior year of study.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following an announcement by the President in December 2017, and confirmed through budget allocations from National Treasury in February 2018, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) introduced the new DHET Bursary Scheme for 2018, providing fully-subsidised funding for poor and working class students at public universities. The Bursary Scheme has been implemented by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) from the 2018 academic year onwards.
- 1.2 The new Bursary Scheme gives effect to Government's vision to ensure that all academically-deserving students from poor and working class backgrounds, who are admitted to study at public universities, are provided with financial support for their undergraduate study programmes, and are supported to succeed. The bursary scheme supports the goals of the National Development Plan (2012) and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013), to expand access to higher education for deserving students through financial support from Government, and to support greater student success and throughput.
- 1.3 The broad parameters of these Guidelines were initially outlined in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document produced in January 2018. The FAQs was an interim measure designed to ensure that key high level decisions could guide the implementation of the Scheme at universities in the 2018 academic year. The first issue of the Guidelines were produced for implementation in the 2019 academic year.
- 1.4 These Guidelines provide the implementation parameters for university student bursaries for the 2020 academic year. The Guidelines are based on the principles that student funding policy must be *fair, rational, affordable and implementable*. This means that the policy decisions are made to ensure that students are provided with the best possible support to succeed, taking into account the different circumstances of different institutions, and that the funding must be affordable within the parameters of the funding provided by government with a focus on the need for sustainability of the scheme for the future. The guidelines also take into account the need to ensure that the bursary scheme is implementable across the university system, including at NSFAS and institutions.

2. Purpose of the DHET Bursary Scheme Guidelines

- 2.1 These Guidelines provide the framework for the implementation of the DHET Bursary Scheme in universities for 2020 and outline the roles and responsibilities of all implementing partners and bursary recipients.
- 2.2 The Guidelines outline the scope and detail of the Bursary Scheme and the processes necessary to give effect to the student funding provided through NSFAS to deserving students in university education.

- 2.3 The Guidelines outline the high level rules applicable to the bursary programme.
- 2.4 The Guidelines will be updated annually.

3. Scope and Applicability of the Guidelines

- 3.1 The Guidelines are applicable to Bursary recipients as well as all implementing partners involved in the Bursary Scheme (including the DHET, NSFAS, and public universities).
- 3.2 All student recipients and potential recipients of the Bursary, as well as the implementing institutions, are subject to the Guidelines and must abide by the rules outlined in this document.
- 3.3 The Guidelines will lay the basis for formal agreements between institutions and NSFAS, and between NSFAS and student recipients. All other rules and guideline documents put in place by NSFAS, DHET and/or institutions will be subject to these Guidelines.

4. Policy and Legislative Context

- 4.1 The Guidelines are subject to the following legislation:
 - Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).
 - Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997 as amended).
 - National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act, 1999 (as amended).
 - The Public Management Finance Act 1 of 1999.
- 4.2 The Guidelines are linked to the implementation of the following policy documents:
 - The National Development Plan (2012).
 - The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013).

5. Qualifying Criteria for the DHET Bursary Scheme:

- 5.1 Recipients of the DHET Bursary Scheme must be South African citizens.
- 5.2 Recipients must have applied for, and been admitted into, a public higher education institution (university) to be eligible for funding.
- 5.3 Recipients must meet the financial qualification criteria for funding. That is, they must have a combined gross family income of up to R350 000 per annum, as assessed and verified by NSFAS.

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- 5.4 Students must be formally registered to study for an approved funded programme at a public university **and** meet the financial qualification criteria, before a bursary award will be confirmed.
- 5.5 Any student who is a South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) recipient automatically meets the financial qualification criteria, and will be eligible for a bursary award provided that they are registered at a public higher education institution. (university).
- 5.6 The financial need of the student will be assessed at the point of first application, and students will not need to re-apply annually.
- 5.7 A student can only be funded for one qualification at one institution at any one time.
- 5.8 Students only receive funding once they have met all the criteria and signed a NSFAS Bursary Agreement (NBA), which indicates that they accept the obligations and responsibilities of the Bursary programme.
- 5.9 The threshold of R350 000 family income per annum only applies to those who were first-time entry (FTEN) students in 2018 and will also apply to those who will be FTENs in 2019 and going forward.
- 5.10 University students who entered their studies prior to 2018 qualify for a grant according to the previous threshold of R122 000 family income per annum. The grants for these students from 2018 onwards are subject to a funding cap, as in prior years.
- 5.11 Students who have already studied at a university or obtained a prior university qualification do not qualify as FTEN students even if they are entering the first year of a new programme. Students starting a university qualification for the first time, but who have already achieved a TVET qualification may qualify as a university FTEN student¹.
- 5.12 In general a university student is eligible for funding for only **one** undergraduate qualification. There are a few exceptions where a second undergraduate qualification would be supported, such as those students who have obtained a Higher Certificate and go on to a Diploma or Degree. (**Annexure A** provides more detailed information on these exceptions.)
- 5.13 Senior university students who apply for funding in 2020 for the first time, and returning NSFAS students (who commenced studies in 2017 or prior to that), may qualify for a grant in terms of the pre-2018 threshold and criteria.

¹ Provided that they did not complete a Diploma or Degree at the TVET College

- 5.14 Any funding received by a senior university student prior to 2018 is subject to the conditions of the Loan Agreement already signed. However, from 2018, funding is provided to all students as a grant, subject to the maximum funding “cap” determined on an annual basis by NSFAS. The funding cap will be R93 400 in 2020.
- 5.15 Students with disabilities are subject to different criteria as set out in the NSFAS Policy (**Annexure B**).

6. Scope of the DHET Bursary for university students

6.1 Approved funded programmes for university students

- 6.1.1 Approved funded programmes at universities are all undergraduate whole qualifications, i.e. degree, diploma or higher certificate programmes, offered by a public university.
- 6.1.2 Additional courses that are not core requirements of a whole qualification are not funded. Occasional programmes are not funded.
- 6.1.3 The only cases where a second qualification is funded are where it is a professional requirement for employment. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is funded. In addition certain Bachelor of Technology (BTech) programmes are funded where there is a professional requirement for completion – a separate list of funded BTech programmes is provided.
- 6.1.4 In general postgraduate qualifications, including Postgraduate diplomas, honours degrees, masters and PhD degrees are not funded. The only postgraduate qualifications funded are the Postgraduate Diploma in Accounting (Certain PGDA) and LLB as indicated in the NSFAS funded qualifications list.

6.2 Tuition fees

- 6.2.1 The tuition fee is the agreed institutional tuition fee for the actual programme of study for each student. NSFAS will only pay tuition fees in line with the agreed sector increase on the tuition fee for 2020.
- 6.2.2 The registration fee or first upfront payment must be included in the tuition fee. This should reflect as one fee rather than as separate items, regardless of how institutions manage their payment processes. University students qualifying for NSFAS funding are not required to pay the initial registration/upfront fee (Refer to 8.2.5).

6.3 Allowances for contact and distance university students

6.3.1 Table 1 provides an indication of which allowances are applicable to different categories of accommodation for **contact students**.

Accommodation Type	Allowance type			
	Learning Materials	Living Allowance	Accommodation	Transport
University managed catering	X	X ²	X ³	
University managed self-catering	X	X	X ³	
Living off campus in family or non-accredited accommodation (own arrangements)	X	X		X
Private off campus accredited accommodation	X	X	X (with lease agreement)	

6.3.2 **Distance university students** qualify for learning materials allowances only. However, distance students studying an equivalent full-time course load of a contact student also qualify for the incidental allowance. This requires a student to be registered for a minimum of ten courses in one academic year.

6.4 Living allowance for contact university students in residences or accredited private accommodation

6.4.1 This applies to contact university students in university owned or managed residences or accredited private residences.

6.4.2 A living allowance will be provided directly to all DHET bursary recipients at universities **not accommodated in catering residences**, to cover food and incidental expenses. In 2020, this allowance will be R15 000⁴. All NSFAS

² Food allowance paid directly to institution and incidental allowance to student

³ Paid directly to institution

⁴ Any university that is providing DHET bursary students (R350k-qualifying cohorts) with amounts above this threshold must take responsibility for providing students with the additional support. They should phase out the higher than approved amounts to reach the standards set for the system if not already done.

bursary/grant recipients at universities qualify for this allowance, subject to the funding cap for returning students registered for the first time prior to 2018.

6.4.3 Students in **catered residences** receive an allowance for incidental expenses in addition to their catered accommodation. This amount is R2900 in 2020.

6.5 **Accommodation and travel allowances for contact university students**

6.5.1 The management of access to and allocation of accommodation and travel allowances must be managed according to the institutions' own criteria set by the financial aid committee.

6.5.2 Students living in university accommodation qualify for the actual costs of the accommodation charged by the institution.

6.5.3 Students living in university-managed off campus accommodation also receive the actual costs of accommodation, limited to the maximum cost of equivalent university owned on-campus accommodation at a particular institution. It is assumed that transport costs are included in the costs of this accommodation.

6.5.4 In general, qualifying students whose home address is close to a university campus, or those who choose to make their own accommodation arrangements, would not be considered for an award for an accommodation allowance. These students qualify for a travel allowance determined by the institution, up to a maximum of R7 500 in 2020 as well as the living allowance of R15 000.

6.5.5 University students living in private leased accommodation can qualify for an accommodation allowance if they are accommodated in university accredited accommodation.⁵ As with 2019, the maximum allowance for external accommodation is capped at the cost of internal university accommodation costs for an equivalent accommodation type. Proof of a lease agreement must be provided for a student to qualify.

6.5.6 Wherever possible, universities should accredit private providers of student accommodation and should monitor the quality of accommodation provision to students living off campus.

6.5.7 NSFAS students are subject to the student residence and accommodation policies of the university at which they are registered to study.⁶

⁵ Institutions will be required to formally accredit private accommodation if it is to be supported through the accommodation allowance. NSFAS will release guidelines in this regard. Students not in accredited private accommodation will be assumed to be living at home or in privately-arranged accommodation and will receive the transport and living allowance only.

⁶ Where possible, institutions should ensure that NSFAS-funded first-year students are accommodated in university owned and managed accommodation.

6.6 Learning material allowance for university students

6.6.1 All university students qualify for a learning material allowance, which is set at a maximum amount of R5 200 for students who are supported under the new DHET Bursary Scheme for the 2020 academic year.

6.6.2 Students can utilise this allowance for academic books and materials or for computer-related expenses. Only one allowance is provided per student per academic year. Allowances for students in distance education programmes are calculated based on the number of courses registered up to a maximum of R5 200.

6.6.3 Students receive a learning material allowance for each year of study, which can be utilised as they choose. However, each year the allowance is provided at a set amount. Any costs relating to insurance, maintenance and/or repairs of computer equipment purchased, must be covered by the student.

6.7 Determination of bursary award amounts

6.7.1 Allowances will be subject to annual increases. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used to determine increases to food and transport allowances.

6.7.2 Accommodation and tuition fee increases will be in line with agreed institutional increases, unless otherwise indicated⁷.

6.7.3 For private accommodation, annual increases will be capped at the amounts for internal university owned/managed accommodation⁸.

7. Bursary conditions and obligations for recipients

7.1 General conditions

7.1.1 Students on a full DHET bursary may not receive another full cost of study bursary from another source at the same time.

7.1.2 If a student receives a partial bursary from another source, a NSFAS bursary may be awarded, but the allocations must be reduced accordingly, so that the student is supported fully for their studies. This does not apply to occasional support for additional items not supported as part of the NSFAS bursary, or other forms of in-kind support. NSFAS may not pay for amounts already covered by

⁷ Any institution that implements increases above the sector wide agreements must discount the fees for all NSFAS qualifying students (on the DHET Bursary or Grant). These students will be required to pay only the agreed upon increases.

⁸ Institutions are urged to ensure that accreditation agreements with private providers reflect reasonable market-related costs as accommodation costs that are heavily inflated will not be supported by NSFAS.

another funder. Universities are obliged to report this information to NSFAS and to reduce the fee account accordingly.

7.1.3 It is the student's responsibility to inform NSFAS about any other funding that they may have been awarded. Failure to do so will be regarded as fraud, and will result in the termination of the bursary and return of any funding fraudulently received. Any exceptions will be dealt with on an appeal basis through the Financial Aid Office of an institution.

7.1.4 Students can only be funded for one qualification at one institution at any one time. Where a student is required to complete aspects of their programme at another institution, inter-institutional agreements must be in place to ensure that NSFAS payments are only made for one student to a single institution.

7.1.5 Returning NSFAS bursary recipients do not need to re-apply. NSFAS will process their bursary application for the following academic year, based on academic eligibility information received from their institution.

7.1.6 Bursary funding for university students is limited to the minimum period of study for the qualification they are registered for, plus one year (N+1).

7.1.7 Decisions on any changes to programmes are made on an appeal basis to the Financial Aid Office of an institution. Any changes, however, are subject to the original agreed maximum funding duration, that is, N+1 on the original course.

7.1.8 Students continuing to a first undergraduate degree programme following a higher certificate qualification are eligible for funding.

7.1.9 Students who have studied at a TVET College and who are entering a university qualification for the first time are eligible for funding support, provided that they did not complete a Diploma or Degree at the TVET College.

7.2 Academic progression criteria for university students

7.2.1 For all returning students funded on the pre-2018 criteria, who are on NSFAS grant funding, the criteria of 50% courses passed annually within the N+2 rule will continue to apply.

7.2.2 The progression criteria for students on the DHET Bursary Scheme (R350 000 threshold) must be determined by institutions. Institutions will confirm with NSFAS at the start of the academic year that students have qualified for progression according to standard institutional policy and approved rules of progression for the specific programme they are studying.

7.2.3 The criterion of completion within N+1 years must be clearly stated to all students upfront. Students on the DHET Bursary Scheme will receive a maximum of N+1 years of funding from NSFAS. Once this funding has been

exhausted, no further funding will be available to students regardless of the academic status of the student. Institutions are responsible for determining the academic progression rules for each qualification, and indicating to NSFAS whether students qualify for support in the following academic year. Academic data will be audited as part of the HEMIS audit.

7.2.4 University students who drop out of university studies before they complete a qualification, and wish to register at a TVET College, are allowed to transfer, but they will be supported at the TVET College for a maximum timeframe within the original agreement.

7.3 Service work is recognised as an important growth opportunity for all students and as a way of paying back to the community. Students supported through NSFAS funding are encouraged to undertake some form of voluntary service work. Consideration will be given to the practicality of implementing this as a compulsory obligation linked to the bursary in the future.

7.4 Signing of agreements

7.4.1 Every student must complete and sign, upon application, a consent form.

7.4.2 In signing, every student commits to abiding by the conditions and obligations of the DHET Bursary Scheme, managed by the NSFAS.

8. Implementation Roles and Responsibilities

8.1 Responsibilities of DHET

8.1.1 The DHET will ensure that NSFAS has access to the full programme qualification mix (PQM) for universities and the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data to enable effective decisions/confirmations of FTEN students, and of approved funded programmes.

8.1.2 The DHET will update the funding Guidelines on an annual basis. All policy decisions relating to the DHET Bursary Scheme must be approved by the DHET.

8.1.3 The DHET must provide oversight on the collection of data on bursary recipients.

8.2 Responsibilities of NSFAS

8.2.1 NSFAS will provide visible information on the bursary application process on their website and other avenues and keep this information updated. This

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includes making explicit the criteria for funded programmes and the terms and conditions contained in the NSFAS Bursary Agreement.

8.2.2 NSFAS will publicise the application process available to students and the deadlines for applications.

8.2.3 NSFAS is responsible for capturing student data accurately.

8.2.4 Applications will be evaluated in terms of the financial qualification criteria which will be based on the required supporting documentation and informed consent of the applicant.

8.2.5 NSFAS will make decisions on financial eligibility of candidates and provide an indication of the student status in relation to new DHET bursary scheme (R350 000 criteria) and new senior students (previous criteria), and returning students (previous criteria).

8.2.6 A full dataset of financially eligible students will be kept and shared with DHET and universities as appropriate, for use during registration and for planning purposes.

8.2.7 Agreements between NSFAS and students will be signed at the point of application.

8.2.8 NSFAS must disburse an upfront payment to universities and colleges to allow them to make initial allowance payments to students who have registered and are confirmed for funding on the DHET Bursary Scheme.

8.2.9 NSFAS will determine which returning students will be funded based on the continued registration of a student in the funded programme, according to the academic progression criteria of each institution.

8.2.10 NSFAS will sign a Memorandum of Agreement with each university covering the roles and obligations of both parties.

8.2.11 NSFAS will manage an effective and transparent appeals process.

8.3 Responsibilities of universities

8.3.1 Universities should notify NSFAS about students who drop out of the system, as well as students who enrol in semester courses.

8.3.2 Universities must identify students receiving funding from more than one source and inform NSFAS so that NSFAS allocations are adjusted accordingly based on the amounts of other funding received.

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- 8.3.3 Universities must make it known to students that they cannot receive funding for the same qualification from more than one source without notifying the institution and NSFAS.
- 8.3.4 Universities must allow students who are recipients of DHET bursaries to register without paying an upfront or registration fee, if they have been confirmed as financially eligible, as this will be paid as part of their full tuition fee. No upfront payment at registration should be expected from students who have met the NSFAS financial qualification criteria.
- 8.3.5 Universities, utilising the upfront payments from NSFAS, must in the first instance, direct funding to first allowances to ensure that students are able to access funds for living expenses (accommodation, food, transport, etc.) and learning materials, and then secondly direct funding towards paying the first instalment of the tuition fee.
- 8.3.6 Universities must provide student academic data in the agreed format to NSFAS within the agreed time frames.
- 8.3.7 Universities are obliged to submit only the names and details of students for funding who are studying funded qualifications. If incorrect information is submitted the institution will be liable for the costs incurred.
- 8.3.8 Universities must confirm academic eligibility of all senior and returning students to NSFAS. If the information is incorrectly submitted, the institution will be liable for the costs incurred. Academic appeals are the responsibility of individual institutions.
- 8.3.9 Institutions must abide by funding rules when disbursing funding to students.

8.4 Responsibilities of bursary recipients

- 8.4.1 Students must apply for the bursary on time, submitting all the required documents.
- 8.4.2 Students must inform NSFAS and their institutions if they have other sources of funding.
- 8.4.3 Students must meet all academic and attendance requirements of their courses and institutions.
- 8.4.4 Students must meet individual financial commitments, e.g. paying landlords on time, and managing living allowances.
- 8.4.5 Students must notify NSFAS through the financial aid office in the event of a change of programme or when they exit a programme.

8.4.6 All students in receipt of the DHET Bursary Scheme must sign a NSFAS Bursary Agreement.

9. Review of Guidelines

The guidelines will be reviewed on an annual basis.

ANNEXURE A

Funded BTech Programmes

B TECH: ARCHITECTURAL TECHNOLOGY
B TECH: ARCHITECTURE (PROFESSIONAL)
B TECH: BIOKINETICS
B TECH: BIOMEDICAL TECHNOLOGY
B TECH: BIOTECHNOLOGY
B TECH: CARTOGRAPHY
B TECH: CHIROPRACTIC
B TECH: CLINICAL TECHNOLOGY
B TECH: DENTAL TECHNOLOGY
B TECH: EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE
B TECH: ENGINEERING: CHEMICAL
B TECH: ENGINEERING: CIVIL
B TECH: ENGINEERING: ELECTRICAL
B TECH: ENGINEERING: INDUSTRIAL
B TECH: ENGINEERING: MECHANICAL
B TECH: ENGINEERING: MECHANICAL: MECHATRONICS
B TECH: ENGINEERING: METALLURGY
B TECH: ENGINEERING: REFRACTORIES
B TECH: FORESTRY
B TECH: HOMOEOPATHY
B TECH: NURSING
B TECH: NURSING SCIENCE
B TECH: NURSING: COMMUNITY NURSING
B TECH: NURSING: PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
B TECH: NURSING: OCCUPATIONAL NURSING