

research report

NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME

THE NSFAS RESEARCH TEAM HAS BEGUN TO INVESTIGATE

different ways of determining need. The amount allocated to each Higher Education Institution each year is based on the full cost of study and the level of need experienced by students at the institution. To date, the racial breakdown of the student body has played a large role in determining the level of financial need at institutions across the country. We are becoming increasingly more aware that there are a variety of other factors, apart simply from race, that result in financial constraints.

The National Means Test, which has been used at all public higher education institutions since 2003, is a tool that tests a student's eligibility for financial assistance. Data from this application is providing us with a wealth of comparative information that goes a long way in helping us to understand the financial pressures faced by students. We have now collected three full years of historical data and continue to do so with the hope that our answer to determining need lies in the eligibility testing data.

While paying such close attention to the Means Test, we have taken this opportunity to re-evaluate the parameters that inform the test. After many years of using the Household Subsistence Survey to set basic needs allowances, we are investigating other ways to more accurately represent a basic cost of living. With assistance from both Statistics South Africa and the HSRC, we hope to implement changes in time for the 2007 academic year.

We continue to look at incentives for students finishing their studies in the minimum time frame as well as students studying in areas of scarce skills. We look at ways to attract students to targeted fields of study without limiting their access to higher education, which is our core focus.