



THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, PROFESSOR BLADE NZIMANDE STATEMENT ON THE POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR STATE OF READINESS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2024

23 January 2024

Programme Director Mr Veli Mbhele

Deputy Minister, Mr Buti Manamela;

Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi;

DDGs Present;

NSFAS Acting Board Chairperson Prof Lourens Van Staden and the Acting CEO Mr Masile Ramorwesi;

Chairpersons and CEOs of all our entities;

Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, TVET and CET Principals;

Labour Unions;

Student formations;

Members of the media;

Fellow South Africans

I called this briefing to share with the public our readiness for the opening of the 2024 Post School Education and Training academic year.

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO THE 2023 MATRICULANTS

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the 2023 matriculation class for attaining **82.9%** national Matric pass rate, marking a significant increase of 2.8 percentage points from the 2022 80.1% pass rate.

Out of the **715,719** full-time candidates who enrolled to write the National Senior Certificate exams, an impressive **572,983** students successfully passed. Notably, the number of bachelor passes rose to 40.9% in 2023 from 38.4% in 2022.

It is also noteworthy to observe an upward improvement in the provincial results across all provinces, as well as 40.9% Bachelor pass, 27.2% Diploma pass and a 14.8% Higher Certificate pass.

This commendable upward trajectory, provides yet another opportunity for the PSET sector to meet its National Development Plan targets.

I also congratulate all our PSET students who also wrote their 2023 examinations at our TVET colleges, Community Colleges and Universities.

We released the electronic results for **NC(V)** and **Engineering Studies** to **TVET** campuses on the **11th January 2024** after approval of results on 9 January 2024.

We released the electronic results for **Business Studies** to campuses on the **10th January 2024** after approval of results on 09 January 2024.

On the 14th to 17th January provinces printed Statement of Results for **GETC: ABET L4** for release to candidates on 20 January 2024 after approval of results on 09 January 2024.

MARKING THE 30TH CELEBRATION OF DEMOCRACY IN THE PSET SECTOR

As part of our 30th celebration of the advent of democracy in South Africa, and the 12 years of the adoption of the National Development Plan (NDP), my Department of Higher Education and Training ensured that we continue to:

- Expand *access* to PSET opportunities;
- Improve the *quality* of PSET provisioning;
- Improve *success* of the PSET system;
- Improve *efficiency* of the PSET system to ensure the resources are used optimally; and
- Enhance the *responsiveness* of the PSET system.

Since the advent of our democratic government, we have substantially grown access by systematically transforming the nature, size and shape of our PSET system meet South Africa's vital national developmental goals.

Our universities are poised to meet their NDP enrolment target of 1.62 million by 2030.

We have taken a decision to further massify our TVET college system towards the goal of 2.5 million enrolment in this sector, although this wil

require significantly higher levels of investment, new infrastructure, staff and student enrolments. Significantly more funding will also be required to triple the CET gross students enrolments to 1 million in order to meet our NDP 2030 targets.

However, we have increased the enrolments of both male and female student and significantly increased the overall enrolment of black African students in our public universities with over 80 percent of total student enrolment. This registers a major transformation landmark in the history of South African higher education.

Although the participation rates of black African students have increased significantly, we still have to decisively deal with, deep-seated class inequalities manifest across the racial demographics of our PSET system.

From 2016 to 2023, we increased a proportion of students living with disabilities in our PSET institutions to about, 0,8 percent. We are determined to increase this numbers by making sure that their learning and living environment is improved to meet their requirements.

To ensure the success of our PSET system, we have also vigorously promoted attainment of higher levels of success and graduation rates of both females and male students and TVET colleges certification rate also increased significant.

Our university sector is now more efficient in terms of throughput rates and the decline of the dropout rates. We are managing the dropout rate of students in all our institutions by means of multiple social interventions within all our institutions and across the system with the assistance of psycho-social services of Higher Health.

Public spending on the PSET system has significantly grown under this Government. By UNESCO standards, as South Africa we continue to spend a large share of our national budget and wealth on education (both schooling and post-schooling).

Our spending on education as a proportion of overall government expenditure (22.7 percent in 2019/20) and GDP (7.2 percent in 2019/20) which far exceeding the benchmarks set by UNESCO, which recommends allocating 15–20 percent of public spending to education and 4–6 percent of GDP to education.

Our government expenditure on total education even exceeded that of other BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India and China, as well as the average for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

Through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) we continue to support students from the working class and the poor, with over 70 percent of university students, and over 90 percent of TVET college students, benefitted from NSFAS bursaries.

The drastic expansion of NSFAS funding in recent years had been accompanied also by massive increases in infrastructure funding across the PSET system to enable new academic facilities and student residences to be constructed. This is a clear success of the 6th Administration and a lasting legacy for future generations.

It should however be noted that the achievement of our 2030 targets would be dependent on availability of adequate funding from the fiscus and the underlying strength in our economy.

As announced by the President during SONA, we will establish a University of Science and Innovation in Ekurhuleni that will enable young people to be trained in high-impact and cutting-edge technological innovation for current and future industries, as well as a new University for Crime and Policing Studies in Hammanskraal to improve the quality of education and training for South Africa's policing and criminal justice services.

Technical planning work is currently underway to provide Government with detailed plans to enable the long-term development of the new academic institutions and it is expected this work would be completed in 2024.

To further enhance the responsiveness of our PSET, we continue to refine our programmes in all our institutions to be responsive to the needs of the labour market, particularly to provide skills in science, engineering and technology (SET) fields of study.

Through our TVET colleges we also continue to increase learning programmes required for occupations in high demand.

2024 STATE OF READINESS

We have activated an Operations Room and Observatory to ensure timeous reporting and discussion of challenges experienced during registration.

We have developed a monitoring tool to assess registration, readiness for teaching and learning, student academic support, management and stakeholder relations, plans for funding new and returning students, status of institutional finances and challenges.

Technical Vocational Education and Training

Our TVET college classes commenced on the 15 January 2024.

Our TVET colleges headcount enrolment is **482 244** students in all programmes for the academic year of 2024.

The total of Ministerially-funded programme enrolments for the academic year 2024 will be **407 762**, of which **166 634** will be new students.

The Department will fund a total of **407 762** students and the cost for the additional enrolments will be covered by the National Skills Fund, SETAs, self-paying students and the reserve fund from colleges.

Compared to 2023, our TVET college budget has increased by 3-4%. However, considering the increase of the programme cost and increase in the compensation of employees which amounts to over 10% in 2024, in real terms the budget allocated to colleges is declining.

As a result of this, the Ministerially funded enrolment will decrease by more than 15% in 2024 resulting in the enrolment of fewer students in our public TVET colleges.

After our successful launch of the new Hairdressing occupational programme, we are planning to enrol a total of 862 new students in seventeen (17) of our colleges for 2024. Our Centre of Specialisation (COS) programmes have also increased their enrolment by about 40% to 3 548, of which 1 916 will be enrolled as first year students.

Upon completion of the registration process, our colleges will orientate new students to the college programme offerings and college life.

In an effort to create an enabling and conducive environment for students with disabilities, TVET colleges will be developing and implementing disability support policies and establish Disability Support Units (DSUs).

Lastly, in an effort to enhance student employability and promote entrepreneurship, TVET colleges are, amongst others, required to establish partnerships with industry for placement of students, and implement student-focused entrepreneurship development programmes.

The SONA target on placement of 20 000 unemployed TVET college students in the workplaces for experiential learning is receiving urgent attention.

Our SETAs have provided funding for placement of students in workplaces. We have produced 19 536 artisans, 45 146 learnerships completed, 83 578 learners completed skills programmes, we created 99 778 Work Based learning opportunities.

University education

In order to prepare our university for the beginning of the academic year, and to ensure stronger accountability, we have established a steering committee consisting of representatives from DHET, the Central Application Service (Cas), universities, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and student leaders, both from the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and the South African Technical Vocational Education and Training Student Association (SATVETSA).

University enrolments

All our universities confirmed to have complete the 2023 academic year as planned and the registration of returning students commenced on the 2nd January 2024 and will end mid-February 2024.

Our First Time Entering (FTEN) students commenced their registration on the 15th January 2024. Their registration will close on the 15 February 2024.

Combined, all our universities received 270 000 applications for scarce skills applications for the academic year 2024. Sixty-seven thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine (67 929) of these first-time entering enrolments will be within scarce skills areas and have been projected as follows:

- Engineering: 18 541
- Life and Physical Science: 16 415
- Animal Sciences: 614
- Veterinary Sciences: 206
- Human Health: 9 455
- Teacher Education: 22 698

Following the late release of the matric results, Universities which will accept late applications are CPUT, DUT, MUT, RU, TUT, UFH, Unizulu and WSU.

Universities which indicated they will not accept late applications are CUT, NMU, NWU, SMU, SPU, SUN, UCT, UFS, UJ, UKZN, UL, UMP, UWC, UPU, UNISA, VUT, WITS and Univen.

Central Application Clearing House

To further enable access to all our institutions to those students who have not as yet secured some place of study, we have commenced with our **CACH** social media campaign on the **15th January 2024**.

We have also sent access credentials for institutions to the **CACH** system on the **19th January 2024**. The **CACH** signup service will also be made

available for students to sign up from the **26 January 2024** until the **31st March 2024**.

Institutions will access **CACH** system from **30 January 2024** until **30 October 2024**.

CACH services are available from Mondays to Friday between 8am to 6pm and Saturday from 8am to 2pm.

SMU, TUT, UL, VUT and UWC are receiving applications from CAS in the current phase of the pilot implementation, and UJ, RU, SPU and UMP will be incorporated in the next phase.

We urge the remaining universities to put their names forward so that CAS coverage expands until it has a national footprint.

Community Colleges

Community Colleges have opened on **18 January 2024** for both inland and coastal colleges. Our Community Colleges have approximately **75 000** spaces available for the 2024 academic year.

We have introduced new programme on Civic Education in all our community colleges for the 2024 academic year after piloting by Higher Health.

Our Community Colleges are progressively introducing skills, occupational, Learnerships and non-formal programmes with funding from the National Skills Fund (NSF) and SETAs.

Our colleagues are also expanding their Digital Literacy programmes in partnership with NEMISA for Community College lecturers.

We have also updated our Subject Assessment Guidelines and distributed to them to Community Colleges in preparation for the 2024 academic year.

We used the last quarter of the 2023 academic year for advocacy and to recruit new students into community college programmes.

Unregistered private colleges

I want to once more send my warning to unsuspecting students and parents to be aware of what we call bogus colleges, which mislead members of the public through false promising advertisements which illegally promise to be offering both nationally and internationally recognised qualifications.

I request the public to be vigilant and not fall for fake operators who are not registered and recognized by the South African qualifications system. We urge all parents and students to check on registered colleges in our DHET website www.dhet.gov.za.

NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME

Government continues to prioritise the funding of students from the working class and the poor and also to broaden access to sections of our communities, among others through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

NSFAS remain a unique and the only government agency in the world that provides a wraparound and comprehensive funding mechanism to students in the Post School Education and Training system.

It is truly the most progressive effort by the ANC government to systematically break the legacies of inter- generational social inequality and poverty in access to post school education and training.

Regardless of its challenges, NSFAS funding has grown from disbursing R21.4 million in 1991 to almost 48 billion in 2023.

This is a clear indication that government has prioritised the post school education and training funding and broadened access to those sections of our communities who had no access to post school education and training in past.

The scheme with its enormous responsibility continues to strengthen its governance and management structures by attracting relevant skills to ensure that it fulfil its mandate.

I welcome the intervention by the Board to ensure that it develops mechanism to deal with the all the challenges of the scheme. I will

continue to monitor very closely developments to ascertain that the scheme is able to deliver on its mandate.

This is particularly important if we consider the structural and social constraint to accessing education that was imposed by centuries of colonial and apartheid rule.

There is no doubt that this government has made a decisive contribution towards a break with these reproductive legacies of the past.

2023 outstanding disbursements

In this statement on the 18th of January 2024, NSFAS reported on the number of the 2023 outstanding allowances following the thorough analysis of the data provided by institutions in order to finalise the payment of outstanding allowances for the 2023 academic year.

I call upon NSFAS working together with the affected institutions to ensure that they speedily resolve all these outstanding cases. Whilst this is being resolved, I urge institutions not to deny NSFAS funded students with outstanding payments to register for the current cycle.

Submission of accurate registration information is important to circumvent delays in the payment processes.

I have noted with concern that the main reason for the outstanding payments was due to reconciliations that NSFAS has been engaged with institutions predominantly because of registration data changes.

NSFAS needs to be more strict in 2024 on how it manages the registration adjustment process and institutions ought to submit their registration information accurately upon first submission.

Having noted the importance of registration data to the payment process, for the 2024 academic year, institutions must submit registration data as soon as they are allowed to and for the first cycle of funding. All registration claims to be submitted by no later than the 31 March 2024.

Bursary Applications for 2024

To date, NSFAS has **1,545,822** received applications as of the 21st January 2024, for the 2024 academic year. NSFAS has provisionally funded **657,703** applicants who are SASSA recipients.

NSFAS anticipates additional applications before the close of the 2024 application cycle on 31 January 2024.

All 2024 NSFAS applicants are requested to submit a consent form in order to verify relevant information from third parties.

The information is required to verify the employment status and income level of the parents, guardians, or spouses of the applicant. It is mandatory for applicants to download and upload a completed Consent form on the NSFAS website, portal or mobile app.

The SARS Consent Form requirements affects students who are in the Application Data category and these students should patiently wait for

communication from NSFAS through SMS and email, which will provide instructions on how to upload the form.

Non-submission of a complete, accurate and duly signed NSFAS consent form would disqualify a student for NSFAS funding due to NSFAS inability to evaluate and determine financial eligibility. Such applications will be closed and regarded as “rejected”.

It is important to mention that SASSA beneficiary who have been approved for funding, are NOT required to submit the form. This is because no financial checks are conducted on the parents, guardians, or spouses of the applicants in this case.

Student should note that not submitting the consent form will result in a delay and would mean student would not receive a bursary or the outcome of the application.

Upfront payments

As part of ensuring a smooth beginning of the 2024 academic year, NSFAS will process up to **R4.2 billion** as an upfront payment to all our institutions, prior to the finalisation of the application and registration periods. Out of its financial reserves, NSFAS will pay **R1billion** to TVET colleges and **R3.2billion** to universities.

Eligibility criteria and conditions for financial aid

Before I provide details of our 2024 student allowances, I would like to share on some critical information on NSFAS eligibility criteria and conditions for financial aid.

In terms of the NSFAS Act 56 of 1999 NSFAS is established to provide bursaries to eligible students, and to develop criteria and conditions for the granting of bursaries to eligible students.

Students must be formally registered to study for an approved NSFAS funded qualification at an institution, subject to institutional DHET approved enrolment plans, and meet the financial eligibility criteria, and academic criteria before a bursary award is confirmed.

Equally important, let me state that a student must be studying towards their first certificate qualification or undergraduate qualification for them to qualify for an NSFAS bursary.

Students who have already studied at a university or obtained a prior University qualification do not qualify as first time entering (FTEN) students even if they are entering the first academic term of a new qualification.

However, students starting a university qualification for the first time, but who have already achieved a TVET qualification, qualify as a University first time entering student.

Let me also indicate that continuing and first time entering (FTEN) university students must as of 2024 achieve a course credit pass rate of 50 percent.

Continuing and FTEN university students must achieve a course credit pass rate of 60 percent for the end of the 2024 academic year to succeed academically for 2025 funding year.

TVET college students must note that a bursary may only be awarded to them when they progress to the next NC (V) level if they passed at least five (5) subjects in the previous NC (V) level.

A bursary may only be awarded to students progressing to the next Report 191 level if they passed a minimum of three (3) subjects in the previous N-Level.

Academic progression criteria requirements for continuing students studying occupational programmes are determined by TVET Colleges, and results shared with NSFAS.

Let me also restate that a student that is no longer compliant with the University academic progression pathways or exceeds the University N+ rule may not be funded to study at a university or at a TVET college.

Lastly, a student whose application for financial aid is rejected, or continuing student who did not meet academic progression criteria, may lodge an appeal with the NSFAS.

2024 Allowances

In 2024, living allowance will be **R16,500** for university students; (R3,045 personal care allowance per year and R13,455 meal allowance per year).

In the TVET sector I am happy to announce that the TVET living allowance will increase from **R6,000 to R10,000**. This was done as part of the continued efforts to bring parity between the University and TVET sectors and is a significant achievement in driving transformation in the TVET sector.

Students may either qualify for the travel allowance or the accommodation allowance. In addition, we have introduced the differentiated accommodation CAP between metro and non-metro areas.

All institution owned or leased, and private accommodation will be capped at **R50,000** in metro areas and **R41 000** in all other areas per academic year.

Students living in institution catered accommodation qualify for a maximum allowance capped at **R66,500** in metros and **R57,500** in all other areas per annum. (accommodation inclusive of the living allowance and personal care).

Institutions in non -metro areas may request NSFAS to review the assigned accommodation CAP in exceptional circumstances. Such request must be accompanied by a detailed motivation and supporting evidence for NSFAS consideration.

Students who opt to make their own accommodation arrangements with immediate family or with relatives do not qualify for the accommodation allowance. Instead, these students qualify for a travel allowance determined by the institution, up to a maximum of **R7, 875** in 2024.

All university students qualify for a learning material allowance, which is set at a maximum amount of **R5,460** for students for the 2024 academic year.

The learning material allowances must be used for the purchase of academic books and materials and/ or a learning device. 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 **R5,460**.

Distance University students studying an equivalent full-time course credit load qualify for the personal care allowance of **R3,045** per academic year. This requires a student to be registered for a minimum of 120 course credits in one academic year.

Allowances for students in distance education programmes are calculated based on the number of courses registered up to a maximum of **R5,460**.

TVET college own catered residence in metros is capped at **R60,000** and in other areas is capped at **R51 000**.

TVET College students may either qualify for the travel allowance or the accommodation allowance.

TVET College students who are registered on an occupational qualification may qualify for allowances ONLY if in simulated training, students registered on an occupational qualification that have an employment contract and are paid stipend do not qualify for NSFAS allowances.

Students with disabilities qualifies for living allowances including meals at **R20,000** per academic year. They qualify for learning materials allowance of **R6,000** per academic year for university students only.

TVET College learning material allowance is included in the cost of tuition. Assistive devices allowance actual cost is limited to **R50,000** as a once off allowance.

These students also qualify for a repairs and maintenance of assistive devices to the value of **2,000** per academic year.

Students with disabilities do not automatically qualify for the allowance for assistive devices, or the repairs and maintenance thereof. The allowances are only granted if the student application for these allowances is approved, and all conditions and criteria are met as set out in this policy standard.

Implementation of the first phase of the comprehensive student funding model

On the 14th January I announced the implementation of the first phase of the Comprehensive Student Funding Model which will ensure that the

missing middle students access financial support in a form of a loan to pursue their studies.

This category of students are those who come from families who have a total income of more than R350 000, but not more than R600 000 per annum.

Government has committed the initial capitalisation fund totalling **R3.8 billion** to support the loan scheme in 2024.

This amount comprises of **R1.5 billion** from the National Skills Fund

(NSF), and **R2.3 billion** from Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). This amount will fund approximately **47%** of the missing middle students, that is, **31 884** of the estimated **68 446** missing middle.

NSFAS is currently developing the loan scheme eligibility criteria and conditions for funding so ensure that the scheme is implemented during the 2024 academic year.

However, I must upfront indicate that the scheme will fund both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Seventy percent (70%) of these students will be in the Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes (which may be adjusted to include commercial programmes that are in demand in the labour market or entrepreneurial programmes).

Thirty percent (30%) of the loan will fund Humanities programmes and social science.

All the student who fall within the missing middle category must apply using the current NSFAS application period and ensure they sign the consent form to enable financial verification. All students rejected for financial eligibility, will be re-assessed and reviewed for the missing middle loan.

NSFAS is currently developing guidelines of the loan scheme and they will be communicated to the public in a weeks' time.

Student debt recoveries

From the previous loan scheme, NSFAS is recovering funds from those that previously benefitted from receiving the scheme. The student debt currently sits at over R40 billion.

Recoveries are currently stable, however a lot could be done in this area to augment on the funding currently provided annually from the government if the recoveries are improved.

In the current financial year, the scheme has already recovered in excess of **R110 million**.

I therefore want appeal to students to come forward and be counted by making the necessary arrangements to commence or continue making payments in honour of the conditions of the previous loan scheme. This will ensure the sustainability of our loan scheme.

As part of its proclamation, the Special Investigating Unit has also begun processes to engage former loan scheme beneficiaries to secure acknowledgements of debt and commence making payments.

To date, the SIU has secured acknowledgements of debt to the value of over **R4 million** from individuals and over **R38 million** from institutions of higher learning.

Further to this, the SIU has recovered over **R58 million** from institutions and these funds are being held in trust at the SIU. NSFAS and SIU are engaging on the processes to return these funds.

Implementation of the NSFAS Accommodation Pilot Project

NSFAS is also piloting the accreditation of private student accommodation in seventeen (17) Universities and twenty (23) TVET Colleges for the 2024 academic year.

Through this pilot programme, NSFAS intends to ensure that student accommodation service providers provide student accommodation that is accessible, decent, safe and academically conducive for all students.

The purpose of the student accommodation programme, amongst other is to:

- Assign students to available accommodation;
- Accredite accommodation providers;
- Pay accommodation fees to accommodation providers through secured platforms; and

- Grade accommodation to create a standard and ascertain cap for accommodation.

Since the announcement of the Board in December 2023, NSFAS has successfully engaged individual institutions on the pilot. Out of the total of **38 938** beds registered on NSFAS platforms in our TVET Colleges, **25 989** beds have been accredited and are available for the registered students and **12 949 beds** are in the process of been accredited.

For universities, of the total **67 337** beds registered, **42 965** have been accredited and available and **24 372** beds are in the process of been accredited.

From the 08th January 2024, NSFAS has been providing weekly training on the application and registration process to accommodation providers and students. The training will end in February 2024.

From the 18 January 2024, NSFAS provided access to a portal for all institutions in order to view the available beds. Accrediting Agents are continuing with the process of accreditation and the list is updated daily.

During this registration period, NSFAS developed a plan to visit hot spot areas to ensure that students are not left stranded for accommodation in all our institutions.

I therefore call upon our all our institutions to submit the list of NSFAS funded students who have been registered so that they apply for accommodation through the NSFAS accommodation portal.

Fraud and corruption

As was previously reported, the NSFAS Board is currently implementing all the recommendations of the Werksmans Attorneys report which amongst others will be the process of termination of the current direct payment service providers.

NSFAS management and supply chain management officials have undergone training to ensure that they are properly apprised on the most update legislation and regulations regarding procurement in the public sector.

Furthermore, NSFAS has developed a Code of Ethics and Fraud Prevention Policy which is duly communicated regularly to all staff members.

To further deal with instances of Fraud and Corruption, NSFAS has developed a whistle-blower hotline which is monitored by the legal and forensics team on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NSFAS has launched new platforms to improve its contacts with students. NSFAS applicants can access their applications updates at their finger-tips through the downloadable NSFAS student mobile app, WhatsApp line and a USSD code.

Applicants can add NSFAS on WhatsApp 078 519 8006 or USSD *120*67327 to track their application status.

Email: info@nsfas.org.za

Facebook: National Student Financial Aid Scheme

X: @myNSFAS

This is the NSFAS way of simplifying the lives of applicants and students.

Lastly, let me wish all our first-time entrance students and our returning students, the leadership of student formations, the governance and management of all our PSET institutions a progressive 2024.

Thank you