Statement by Minister of Higher Education and Training: Hon. N.P Nkabane, MP- 16 Sepetember 2024

DHET Director-General, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi

NSFAS Administrator, Mr. Freeman Nomvalo

DDG's present

DHET and NSFAS employees

Members of the media

Fellow South Africans

In the last few years, the student population has grown, and the demand for student financing has equally increased. This is because the government has created access to post school education and training for the historically marginalised people of South Africa, especially for the children of the poor and the working class.

Education is a critical tool used by the government to address historical injustices, poverty, and inequalities and also equip students to enter the labour force as a driver to build a capable developmental state.

It is critical that NSFAS is adequately prepared, in terms of resources and systems, to meet this growing demand when we open for the 2025 online application process.

Many students have expressed frustration over delayed payments and inefficiencies of NSFAS systems. Our constitutional democracy makes provision that the people shall govern; and that means that the people must play a critical role in the administration of the country and we are committed to getting guidance from different role players in the PSET sector.

Beginning on Thursday 12 September 2024, I have had extensive consultations with stakeholders in the PSET sector. The purpose of these consultations was to solicit inputs and proposals to policy positions on matters that affect PSET system.

NSFAS participated in the stakeholder engagement meetings where student formations, universities, and TVET colleges posed robust engagements and shared with us great insights on how best we can turn around the institution.

The importance we attach to these consultations were such that we have had to work over the weekend finishing yesterday.

The following student formations were consulted.

- Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA)
- Economic Freedom Fighter Student Chapter (EFFSC)
- Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA)
- Democratic Alliance Student Organisation (DASO)
- South African Christian Organisation (SCO)
- Action SA Student Chapter
- South Africa Democratic Student Movement (SADESMO)
- MK Party Student Wing

We also consulted extensively with PSET institutional governance structures as follows:

- South African Union of Students **(**SAUS)
- South African Further Education and Training Student Association (SAFETSA).
- South African Public Colleges Organisation (SACPO).
- Universities South Africa (USAF)

It was due to these critical consultations that we have had to postpone the launch of the 2025 NSFAS online application launch, which is a significant concern for students nationwide.

Another reason for postponing the launch of the 2025 NSFAS online application process was to allow NSFAS to do a dry run of the online application system to stakeholders. The feedback received has already informed critical systems changes to simplify the online application process and also making it accessible to all.

Amongst others, the stakeholder engagements helped enrich our understanding of such matters as:

- Addressing of NSFAS inefficiencies- NSFAS is the main factor of instabilities in our Institutions of Higher Learning- linked to the delays in releasing matric examination results translates to delays in funding decisions.
- The challenges confronting NSFAS – ways in which its performance be improved and the general consensus over the need for reforms
- Student funding model and its interface with the SETAs
- Private Student Accommodation should be a conducive environment for both Learning and living.
- Elevating the best practices – currently reinventing the wheel- rethinking how to deal with PSET system holistically and in a systematic way.
- Safety and security of VC's and students which remains a concern.
- TVET sector infrastructure development and ICT challenges.

Increasing the intake of the college system by targeting one million enrolments in Community Colleges and 2.5 million in public and private TVET colleges by 2030. In relation to our universities, we will continue to diversify them based on their strengths and the needs of the communities in which they are located by targeting 1.6 million enrolments by 2030.

During these consultations, I have also reaffirmed our commitment to change the size and shape of our PSET system, particularly to expand the TVET college sector.

We also engaged on:

- The need for alignment between our national skills needs with the curriculum content
- Institutional governance matters and the role of councils
- The correlation between access and success in our PSET system
- Inputs regarding the review of some of the legislation and policies governing our sector.

It is my contention that ongoing discussions with student formations and political bodies will shape the future of higher education policy, particularly regarding student financial aid and accessibility.

Vice-chancellors from various universities together with principals of TVET Colleges also attended the stakeholder meetings – and their collective inputs will definitely help shape our policy positions and approaches to matters of teaching and learning and other areas of interest.

I have just recently returned from China as part of His Excellency; President Ramaphosa's delegation to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). What we should understand is that we have a long-standing cooperation with the people's republic of China in various areas of higher education and training which continues to grow and support South Africa's knowledge and skills development.

Our engagements during this visit aligns with South Africa's strategic goals regarding technological advancement and international collaboration in education. We will be sending about 100 students to China in the coming year to study scarce and critical skills of the future as we advance in skills revolution towards addressing skills mismatch.

Having received a presentation during these stakeholder consultations and having noted the comments received from stakeholders, I am now confident that NSFAS is ready to kickstart the 2025 online application process- effectively this Friday, 20th September 2024. The briefing will take place in this very same auditorium at GCIS at 12h00.

I am therefore inviting all students who are seating for their matriculation this year to take this opportunity and apply for either the NSFAS bursary or loan. This invitation is also extended to learners from grade 9, 10, and 11, who would like to enter the Technical and Vocational Education and Training sector.

We are committed to fulfilling what was said in the Freedom Charter: "Doors of learning and culture shall be opened for all." And we will make sure that no one is left behind, especially the children of the working and the poor in all corners of South Africa.