



National Student Financial Aid Scheme

STATEMENT BY THE NSFAS BOARD CHAIRWOMAN DR KAREN STANDER ON THE OCCASION OF THE NSFAS MEDIA BRIEFING HELD AT GCIS TSHEDIMOSETSO BUILDING- HATFIELD PRETORIA

27 August 2025

Esteemed Members of the Board
NSFAS Management
Differentiated Stakeholders
Members of the media
Ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

It is both an honour and a privilege to stand before you today as we mark six (6) months and nine (9) days our tenure since our appointment as a Board on the 18 February 2025.

Our Board is led by highly qualified individuals with the expertise necessary to drive efficiency, accountability, and transparency.

This Board members possess a minimum qualification of a master's degree and extensive professional experience in strategy, finance, law, engineering, and governance. The Board members are:

My self as the Board Chairperson, Ms Ndileka Portia Loyilane Adv. Richardt Tlou Ramashia , Adv. Lavandran Nanda Gopaul, Ms. Philisiwe Sibiya, Ms. Clarinda Elizabeth Simpson, Ms. Prashika Mahesh, Dr. Siyanda Mngadi, Ms. Karabo Mohale; Dr. Johanna Maphutha, Dr. Mugwena Maluleke, Dr. Marcia Socikwa, Mr Siphwe Khumalo and Mr Lukhanyo Daweti. We are also joined by Mr Waseem Carrim who is our interim CEO.

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REPORT ON IMMEDIATE TASK OF THE BOARD

NSFAS is widely recognised as one of the most impactful social support initiatives of the democratic government. Through NSFAS, government has empowered hundreds of thousands of students from impoverished and working-class communities to pursue higher education and realise their families' aspirations.

With this vital mission in mind, our immediate focus as the Board has been to take decisive and strategic actions to stabilise and enhance NSFAS's operations. We approved all C-Suite appointments, prioritising the filling of executive vacancies to reinforce leadership capacity. Additionally, we authorised a controlled recruitment process for other critical roles within the organization to ensure the effective execution of its mandate.

The Board engaged both internal and external stakeholders to deliberate on the institution's turnaround strategy and established specialised Board Committees to facilitate effective governance and oversee its implementation.

To ensure transparency and inclusivity, the Board held town-hall meetings with organised labour and employees to communicate the strategy and gather employees input.

I am delighted to report that the NSFAS Annual Performance Plan and Five-Year Strategic Plan were submitted to Parliament on schedule, rectifying past delays and addressing issues raised by the Auditor General. This marks a decisive step towards institutional stability and accountability.

Equally important, the Board has prioritised governance by putting the rules firmly in place. In the past quarter alone, over twelve new policies have been approved and implemented, laying the foundation for transparent, ethical, and consistent decision-making. As Nelson Mandela reminded us, rights and responsibilities become meaningless without fair and enforceable rules. By strengthening our policy framework, we are ensuring that NSFAS operates on principles of fairness and accountability rather than discretion or privilege.

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These measures represent more than compliance; they are a demonstration of our collective resolve to restore confidence in NSFAS, safeguard student funding, and align with the highest standards of governance.

Furthermore, as the Board we actively engaged key regulatory and investigative bodies, including the Auditor General, Public Protector, and the Special Investigations Unit, demonstrating full cooperation in investigations, implementing recommendations, and enforcing consequence management for misconduct.

In upholding a zero-tolerance stance on fraud and corruption, the Board directed management to expedite the resolution of pending legal matters related to direct payment partners and the Head Office lease, as well as conclude the legal review of the student accommodation pilot project initiated during the administration period.

In line with the principle of collective stewardship and whole-system collaboration, this Board will continue to work closely with various partners which include the following:

- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)
- Universities South Africa (USAF)
- South African Public Colleges Organisation (SAPCO)
- South African TVET Student Association (SATVETSA)
- South African Union of Students (SAUS)

The partnership sets out our mutual agreement areas which define and honour clear data exchange protocols, promote collaboration on student accommodation, appeals, and registration flows.

The NSFAS Board will use this opportunity to ensure that every decision is informed by evidence, equity, and student experience, as well as upholding the values of dignity, inclusion, and access to opportunity for all. In the words of Nelson Mandela, ***“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”*** As we advance this mission, we also hold fast to the teaching of scripture: *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”* (Matthew

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25:40). Together, these words remind us that our work is not only administrative but profoundly moral — a charge to offer hope, dignity, and opportunity to every student we serve.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

As the Board, we inherited an organisation facing significant challenges, including a collapse in financial and supply chain governance, compounded by the absence of a sustainable funding model focused on impact. This has resulted in governance issues that hinder the organisation’s ability to form meaningful partnerships.

Additionally, the organisation’s ICT systems are misaligned with business requirements and lack integration, exposing severe cybersecurity risks given NSFAS’s size and scope.

The organisational design has not evolved in tandem with changes in funding structures, leading to breakdowns in human resources management and the absence of a cohesive organisational culture.

A critical trust deficit exists between NSFAS, higher education institutions, student bodies, and students, with ongoing blame-shifting within a system characterized by essential interdependencies. Moreover, leadership instability spanning nearly a decade has contributed to organisational turbulence and governance breakdowns. Lastly, insufficient reputation management has impeded NSFAS’s capacity to establish and sustain vital partnerships necessary for fulfilling its mandate.

The principal question that occupies the Board is “How do we move NSFAS from instability to an institution that is vibrant, effective, and future-ready?” and the answer lies between two critical paths – recovery road and reimagination of the future-fit NSFAS.

A blueprint for a stronger NSFAS is needed, and the key outcomes spelled out in the NSFAS Five-Year Strategic Plan provide an opportunity to reimagine and modernise the entity, ensuring it becomes a pillar of access, redress, and economic empowerment.

In alignment with our strategic objectives and plans, NSFAS has submitted its Annual Performance

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Report 2024/2025 on time, with the Annual Financial Statements submitted five months earlier than the prior year.

But numbers and deadlines alone are not enough. We must remember that NSFAS exists not only to take students *to* university and TVETs, but also to ensure they are supported *through* their journey there, into meaningful futures. That requires more than funding: it requires communication, transparency, and a student-centred culture.

Education is not a narrow transaction—it is a public good, a private good, and a personal good. As NSFAS is funded by society, we carry the responsibility to show society a return on its investment: graduates who uplift their families, strengthen the economy, and contribute to the democratic project.

To strengthen the long-term sustainability of NSFAS, the Board has approved the terms of reference for six priority projects to be undertaken to:

- Organisational Design and Realignment
- Loan Management Strategy
- Sustainable Funding Framework
- Transitional Framework for Student Accommodation
- ICT Assessment and Digital Transformation Strategy
- Revised Business Operating Model

We are firmly committed to dedicating our resources to these critical priorities, with the conviction that such focus will enable NSFAS to emerge as a transformative force for good in South Africa. The organization will uphold its progressive legacy of addressing intergenerational social inequalities by expanding access to, and improving outcomes in, post-school education and training across the country.

DECENTRALISATION OF NSFAS

The centralised nature of NSFAS operations has led to inefficiencies and delays in service delivery. Various stakeholders, including institutions; students' formations; accommodation providers and other

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interested parties have made a call on the importance of NSFAS to regionalise its operations and services. The scheme has commenced with consultations with our universities and TVET Colleges to explore options to ensure that organisation is accessible to critical stakeholders and consequently improve service delivery. This include the relocation of the NSFAS Head Office to Tshwane, as with over 400 000 students, the City of Tshwane, is the student capital of South Africa.

DEALING WITH NSFAS SUSTAINABILITY

We need to tread carefully. Our mission is not only to fund students today, but to ensure that the children of tomorrow also have access to the same opportunities. To achieve this, we must bring society with us, and in particular the poor, who are the heart of NSFAS's mandate. Sustainability requires difficult decisions. We must remain within budget so that we do not take resources away from other vulnerable groups in society who equally depend on public support. At the same time, we must ensure that the students we support succeed, graduate, and ultimately contribute back into the system as taxpayers—helping to sustain the very funds that made their education possible.

The Board has noted challenges relating to the financial sustainability of the scheme. We have firmly committed ourselves to raise funding from government and the private sector, empowered by the Government Gazette 41390, published on the 19 January 2018, which empowers NSFAS to enter into agreements, including public private partnerships to assist it in fulfilling its mandate in terms of extending, administering, and recovering loans granted and financial aid.

This provision was not utilised to the fullest to assist in replenishing the NSFAS decreasing funding. Furthermore, we have also capacitated our loan recovery unit with human resource capacity to ensure that we recover all the monies owed to NSFAS by the previous loan recipients. I will come back to this point later.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA AND CONDITIONS FOR FINANCIAL AID

Our Board has approved the development of institutional policies and strategies governing the eligibility criteria and conditions for financial aid. This initiative is not for the distant future but will take effect from

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the next academic year, as directed by DHET. We must ensure that NSFAS remains within budget, as per the NSFAS act and the PFMA, while at the same time fulfilling our duty to widen access to higher education.

This initiative aligns with the Department of Higher Education and Training's Comprehensive Student Funding Model, which seeks to support diverse categories of students—including those not previously covered by mainstream NSFAS funding—to access educational and training opportunities at South African public institutions. By acting now, we address the historic delays in approving eligibility criteria and establish a clear and consistent framework for financial aid assessment.

The Board commits to applying this policy fairly and equitably, ensuring that both financial and academic eligibility are evaluated with transparency and consistency for new applicants and continuing students. As Nelson Mandela reminded us, ***“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice.”*** We believe that by strengthening our rules and remaining disciplined in our stewardship, we act with justice—protecting today's students while safeguarding opportunities for the next generation.

FUNDING DECISIONS, DISBURSEMENTS AND BUDGET SHORTFALL

During this academic year, payments to universities were processed promptly, ensuring the timely disbursement of student allowances and supporting the smooth progression of the academic calendar.

However, In March 2025, NSFAS disclosed to Parliament that in 2025 NSFAS is over subscribed amounted to R10.6 billion for university education. The fund is oversubscribed due to several key factors:

1. An increasing number of students qualifying for higher education.
2. The ongoing cost of living crisis, which has expanded household eligibility for NSFAS support.
3. Declining state resources in real terms, impacting funding availability.

Section 14(3) of the NSFAS Act explicitly prohibits overspending beyond the allocated budget.

As a result of the budget deficit there are students who have been unable to register who fall into four

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categories:

- University students who applied during the TVET cycle.
- Students whose registration data was received after the 31 March cut off date.
- Approved appeals which cannot be funded.
- Second semester registrations; and
- Second semester first time new entries.

Working with the Department of Higher Education and Training and the National Treasury, we remain committed to ensuring that no student is unfairly excluded. NSFAS has already submitted a request for the utilisation of other funds to supplement this shortfall.

It is important to stress: this is a **shortfall**, not a **bail-out**. The new Board and Acting CEO are committed to correcting this course.

We must face the truth: the root cause lies in a funding model that promised more than the resources available, without adjusting eligibility criteria accordingly. That is why the new Board has approved the development of institutional policies and strategies to govern eligibility and conditions for financial aid, ensuring that from the next academic year NSFAS remains within budget while still serving those most in need.

Although we have not yet fully addressed the budget shortfall, we are pleased to provide an update on the utilisation of the 2025 allocations allocated to NSFAS.

On Universities:

- Total Allocation for 2025: R39.30 billion
- Total Paid to Date (including upfront payments): R28.86 billion
- Allocation Balance: R10.43 billion
- Percentage Utilised: 73.45%
- Cash Received to Date: R28.86 billion

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- Funding Shortfall for the Year: R10.06 billion

The Universities have utilised over 73% of their allocated funding. However, a funding shortfall of R10,4 billion remains. NSFAS is in the process of obtaining the required approval and concurrence to fund this short fall.

On TVET Colleges:

- Total Allocation for 2025: R9.12 billion
- Total Paid to Date (including upfront payments): R6.44 billion
- Allocation Balance: R2.68 billion
- Percentage Utilised: 70.62%
- Cash Received to Date: R6.44 billion
- Funding Shortfall for the Year: R1.61 billion

The TVET colleges have utilised over 70,6% of their allocated funding. However, a funding shortfall of R1,6 billion remains. NSFAS is in the process of obtaining the required approval and concurrence to fund this short fall.

These payments were made to 783,035 students, comprising 576,762 university students and 206,273 TVET students.

Having said that, good progress has also been recorded this year. NSFAS made early funding decisions and upfront payments to the institutions from January till March. These funds enabled institutions to promptly provide essential allowances to students. This proactive approach ensured timely payment of allowances for February 2025, mirroring previous disbursement models. The successful payment of upfront payments to universities is a demonstrably positive outcome.

NSFAS is actively working to strengthen its disbursement system. Enhancing this system is essential to ensure that students receive their allowances promptly and without delays.

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This initiative forms part of the Department of Higher Education and Training's Comprehensive Student Funding Model, which aims to extend support beyond traditional NSFAS bursaries and to cover categories of students not previously supported. In particular, it provides opportunities for the "missing middle" and for postgraduate students who are pursuing NQF Level 8 qualifications. These graduates are critical for the economy, as they feed into professional designations and scarce skills pipelines that South Africa urgently needs.

As part of this effort, it is essential to debunk persistent myths that discourage students from applying. It is not true, for example, that children of government employees are excluded from NSFAS support; eligibility is determined by household income thresholds, not the employer. It is also not correct that NSFAS loans are restricted to undergraduate students; postgraduate students, including those at NQF Level 8, are encouraged to apply. Similarly, funding is not limited to full-time contact students—part-time and distance students at accredited institutions may also qualify, provided they meet the academic and financial criteria.

By correcting these misconceptions and ensuring that prospective applicants understand the eligibility rules, NSFAS can improve uptake, expand opportunities, and deliver on the Comprehensive Student Funding Model's promise of a fairer, more inclusive system.

APPEALS

One other critical issue relates to student appeals. To date, NSFAS has received a total of 87,121 appeals from first-time entrants, returning, and continuing applicants. All appeals have been processed, resulting in 38,243 approvals. However, 7,567 of these approved appeals, specifically registration claims, could not be loaded due to insufficient funds. Additionally, 14,731 appeals have been rejected. Currently, there are 5,915 appeals that remain unresolved, broken down as follows:

- 137 appeals require finalization by Team Leaders to update application statuses.
- 4,933 appeals were submitted during Semester 2; of these, 3,770 will be closed as they are resolved through the results mechanism with institutions.

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- The appeals team from the Semester 2 cohort will still need to process 1,163 appeals, with a target completion date of 29 August 2025.

Furthermore, the number of missing document appeals has decreased from 1,884 to 597 this week. Once these appeals reach 30 days without resolution, they will be automatically closed by the system.

Applicants have a 30-day window to lodge an appeal following a rejection, and a further 30 days to submit any outstanding documents. The process involves multiple exchanges between the applicant and appeal officers to ensure the correct documentation is provided. This iterative process can result in delays, causing NSFAS to miss the targeted deadline for completing appeal resolutions. Some appeals remain unresolved for extended periods, primarily due to the nature of the supporting documents submitted by applicants. However, NSFAS aims to conclude all appeal processes within 45 days.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

NSFAS is reviewing student accommodation management and third-party partnerships. This review involves the entirety of student accommodation which includes mandate, roles and responsibilities, procurement processes to appoint third party solution partners and accreditation partners, contracting arrangements, potential breach of contract as well as potential fraud, corruption and maladministration.

The review is conducted by ENS Africa who will source the necessary legal and forensics expertise as and when required. The review started in January 2025 and is expected to be completed by latest end of September 2025. NSFAS intends to announce student accommodation plans for 2026 by the end of October 2025.

NSFAS will ensure that it builds the correct governance framework, policy environment, internal controls, skills and capacity and business processes to ensure that the student accommodation function is appropriately managed. Consequence management will be implemented against officials found to have acted inappropriately in the student accommodation function.

In the 2025 academic year, the NSFAS Accommodation pilot covered **329,038** beds across participating

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twenty-three (23) TVET Colleges, and seventeen (17) Universities for the 2025.

Applications received and students onboarded were:

- TVET Colleges: **38,036** applications; **25,918** enrolled students.
- Universities: **96,758** applications; **86,093** enrolled students.
- A total of **112,011** students accessed accredited accommodation through the pilot. However, **37,913** beds remain pending accreditation (**8,138** at TVET Colleges; **29,775** at Universities).

NSFAS continues to make substantial payments to landlords who submit legitimate claims. We therefore continue to urge accommodation providers to submit claims according to guidelines to avoid student eviction.

To mitigate the challenges expressed by students and landlords alike, we have implemented a new online system to address these challenges. This integrated platform facilitates the electronic bed identification, accreditation, and grading for student accommodation.

NSFAS remains on hand to support any student anywhere who is facing challenges with their student accommodation. All they need to do is reach out to us and we will do what is within our powers to assist.

TERMINATION OF DIRECT PAYMENT CONTRACTS AND HEAD OFFICE LEASE

NSFAS is actively pursuing the termination of contracts for direct payment service providers as a result of irregularities that have been identified. We are collaborating with the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) processes of approaching the tribunal. This is a complex legal process, and we are committed to ensuring compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. Furthermore, NSFAS will join as co-applicant in the SIU application to set aside the NSFAS Head Office Lease contract. The application will be made to the Special Tribunal.

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LOAN RECOVERIES

NSFAS is calling on former beneficiaries who received loans before 2018 to repay their student debt, as required by their signed agreements. These repayments are due once a debtor earns above R30,000 per year. The minimum monthly repayment amount is determined by income level.

Debtors earning above R30,000 per year who are not currently making the minimum repayments may have their accounts handed over to an External Debt Collector (EDC).

As of August 2025, the following entities are currently duly appointed and authorised by NSFAS to act as EDCs in respect of student loan recoveries:

- Khumalo Masondo Attorneys Incorporated
- New Integrated Credit Solutions (Pty) Ltd (NICS)
- Ncube Incorporated Attorneys
- Morkalio Revenue Solutions (Pty) Ltd
- QLink Holdings (Pty) Ltd

This confirmation is issued to provide assurance to debtors, employers, and stakeholders regarding the EDCs currently authorised to engage in NSFAS loan recovery activities.

Applicants must not the following important conditions:

- All repayments must be made only into the official NSFAS recoveries bank account, as published on the NSFAS website: [NSFAS Official Repayments Page](#).
- Authorised EDCs are mandated to facilitate recoveries in line with NSFAS policies.
- EDCs will never request payment into any account other than the official NSFAS recoveries bank account.
- NSFAS may periodically update the list of authorised EDCs. Please visit the NSFAS website where the most up to date listing of authorised EDCs is available

IN CONCLUSION

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NSFAS remains committed to delivering accurate and timely student financial aid. We appreciate the collaboration of the Department of Higher Education and Training and other stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of NSFAS. The board's focus on addressing operational challenges, building institutional capacity, and implementing technological solutions will significantly improve NSFAS's performance.

NSFAS will continue to act with justice, fairness, and responsibility—ensuring that today's students succeed and tomorrow's generations inherit a sustainable system of opportunity.

Thank you very much

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