



19 February 2017

GCIS headquarters, Pretoria.

Statement by NSFAS Board Chairperson Mr Sizwe Nxasana, during a media briefing on the status of 2017 NSFAS applications for university and TVET college students

Good Morning ladies and gentlemen of the media

Thank you all for responding to this invitation.

I would like to provide a status report regarding NSFAS applications for the 2017 academic year. The first two months of 2017 have been business unusual for the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), as this academic year officially marks the first year that we are fully rolling out the Student-Centred Model to Universities and TVET Colleges. This new model will allow NSFAS to establish a direct relationship with its students from the time they enter higher education until post-graduation. On 17 February this past Friday, NSFAS closed the last phase of applications for the 2017 academic year. We opened the first phase of applications on the 01st of August 2016 and closed on the 30th of November that year, after which NSFAS took a decision to open another phase of applications to allow more students who had not applied to submit their applications.

The second phase of applications was therefore opened on 09 January 2017 and closed on 20 January for university students. TVET college students were granted until 17 February 2017 to submit their applications. In total, NSFAS allowed 162 days from last year, for students to apply at 26 public universities and 50 TVET colleges in the country. From these two application phases, NSFAS received a total of 161,938 applications from university and TVET college students. 129,510 of these applications were submitted online, while 32 428 were manual applications.

Out of these applications received NSFAS has so far approved and sent communication to a total of 105, 135 successful new students and confirmed funding for 204,653 returning students made up as follows;

	Universities	TVET Colleges	Total
New entrants	79,077	26,058	105,135
Returning students	110,205	94,448	204,653
TOTAL	186,282	120,506	309,788

With the closing date for applications for students planning to study at TVET colleges having closed on the 17th of February, the evaluation of the remaining applications will be completed by the 24th of February which will see a significant increase in TVET college students approved for funding. Given the completion of some 2016 academic year examinations in January 2017 in certain universities, there are also more qualifying students whose results are being evaluated which will also increase the numbers of funded university students. We expect to add more than 100,000 students to the already 309,788 students already funded.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr. Blade Nzimande has confirmed that the NSFAS funding budget for 2017 will be R15 billion. From this budget, we expect to fund well over 405 000 students who were funded in 2016 at both universities and TVET colleges.

Out of the total 161,938 applications received, regrettably, we can confirm that there were 53,043 unsuccessful applications from university and TVET college students. Some 3760 applications are still being reviewed. We have also communicated with these unsuccessful applicants and have announced an appeals process available to them. Unsuccessful students can lodge an appeal by downloading an application form on the NSFAS website, filling it in, and emailing it – together with their recommendations - to this email address: appeals@nsfas.org.za. Appeals should reach NSFAS on or before 28 February 2017

During the application process, NSFAS worked tirelessly with the Department of Higher Education and Training, Universities SA, all Universities, TVET colleges, student representative councils to deal with the challenges that students were encountering during the registration process. There are a number of key agreements which were reached to improve the process of funding and registering NSFAS qualifying students. This included the following;

1. in January we took a proactive decision to release 15% upfront payments to each university and TVET college which in total was R1.3 billion. This disbursement was received by universities and TVET colleges to allow students to register without having to pay upfront registration fees and take care of other related costs involving NSFAS students such as accommodation allowances.
2. all university students who were funded by NSFAS in 2016 and passed at least 50% of their modules, will be automatically funded this year provided they have signed their loan agreement forms from last year.

3. all TVET colleges students who were funded by NSFAS in 2016 must meet the minimum academic progression rules set by the Department of Higher Education and Training to receive continuing NSFAS funding, provided that they sign the schedule of particulars form for 2016.

4. all new entry students who had applied to NSFAS who came from quintile 1,2 and 3 schools and/or come from households who depend on South African Social Service Agency (SASSA) grants who have been offered a space in a university or TVET college will be funded by NSFAS.

5. all other students who applied for NSFAS funding who do not meet the above criteria are evaluated using the normal NSFAS financial means test and academic criteria.

We do realise that our system did not go smoothly in all areas, and would like to apologise to all students who have been inconvenienced in one way or another at their respective institutions. As we speak today, we have attended to most issues relating to returning students at universities to ensure that they are in class tomorrow.

We have noted various reports on student protests and unrest at some universities regarding the issue of accommodation for NSFAS funded students. The universities and TVET colleges are tasked with accrediting the private accommodation providers and only then that NSFAS will register these private accommodation providers as merchants for the universities and TVET colleges already on the sBux disbursement system. For universities and TVET colleges not on the sBux system, NSFAS pays the universities and TVET colleges who then settle with providers of private accommodation. It's important to note that NSFAS does not make decisions on which students qualify for private accommodation allowances. Additionally, NSFAS does not have any relationship with private accommodation providers and we are not involved in any accreditation process.

Conclusion

The 2017 year has been a significant year with the full implementation of the student centred model. We would like to thank the DHET, the universities, the TVET colleges and student

representatives councils and bodies for the collaboration and support during this transition year.

Thank You