

NSFAS beneficiaries urged to sign SOPs

Higher Education and Training Minister Naledi Pandor has appealed to confirmed National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) beneficiaries to come forward and sign their Schedule of Particulars (SOP).



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Briefing Parliament on NSFAS developments in the National Assembly on Tuesday, Pandor said that in the first eight days of the administration, R2.2 billion has been disbursed, with 43,925 students signing outstanding SOPs and confirmed for payment.

“In terms of outstanding SOPs, the largest number of unsigned contracts is that of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college students, at over 30,000 TVET college students who are confirmed beneficiaries have not signed and not received their funds. We appeal to them to come forward,” Pandor said.

Students at the University of South Africa (UNISA) have also been paid the outstanding book allowances.

Positive progress in applications process

The Minister reported that there has been positive progress in the first two weeks of the opening of the 2019 NSFAS applications process.

She said that links have been re-established with all institutions and institution heads, and student leaders have played a critical role in communicating with students.

“Over 50 NSFAS staff have been deployed to be on site at institutions to ensure resolution of outstanding issues. In the process, additional 50,000 students have been identified as falling within the criteria for NSFAS support,” Pandor said.

Commenting on growing public concern at the inability of NSFAS to efficiently administer the processing of application and disbursement, the Minister acknowledged that the concerns did not begin this year, but they have existed for several years.

She said the public, including higher education institutions and students are right to be concerned, given the important role NSFAS plays in ensuring the transformation of the human resource profile of South Africa.

Pandor recently appointed Dr Randall Carolissen as the administrator for NSFAS to take over the governance, management and administration of the entity.

This followed the resignation of its board chairperson, Sizwe Nxasana.

Pandor said the department has secured staff secondments from universities and TVET colleges to support the administrator.

She emphasised that immediate work of NSFAS is close out of 2017 and 2018, and opening 2019 applications successfully.

Roadmap to address NSFAS problems

Once the immediate challenges have been fully addressed, the Minister said the administrator will focus on identifying the root causes of problems at NSFAS, and developing solutions and a roadmap to address them.

“The scheme will focus on systems and processes that will create an effective model for the future. We have opened 2019 applications, and have announced 30 November 2018 as the closing date. We have also requested universities and colleges to encourage students to apply and to support NSFAS in the turnaround.

“We anticipate a significant business redesign which should be put in place after the 2019 registration period. The steps taken by the administrator thus far have signalled that it will be possible to achieve significant improvements in the administration period,” she said.

Meanwhile, the Minister assured Parliament that the matter of NSFAS CEO, Steven Zwane, is a NSFAS matter that will be addressed by the administrator, and not the Minister or the department.

Zwane was suspended over allegations of gross maladministration. Since government introduced free higher education this year, over R17 billion has been disbursed to universities and TVET colleges.