



**MINISTRY
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Statement after the meeting between the Ministry of Higher Education and Training and the Vice-chancellors of South Africa's public universities

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Today the Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Blade Nzimande held a meeting with the Vice-chancellors of South Africa's 26 public universities to discuss preparations and arrangements for the start of the new academic year. Also in attendance were senior representatives of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

Frank discussions were held. The Ministry expressed appreciation for the work that the Vice-chancellors are doing to create a stable situation in our universities. Vice-Chancellors also expressed their appreciation for the support government has given the sector as well as the leadership of the Minister. The meeting welcomed the R6.9 billion additional funds that government has committed.

It was confirmed that all qualifying students who have been offered a place at a university and who qualify for NSFAS funding can register without upfront payment. It was noted that substantial progress is being made with improving the functioning of NSFAS.

Each institution has payment plans in place for all categories of students. For the 'missing middle' group of students, the meeting noted the processes in place, including the new model to be piloted next year, as recommended in the Presidential Task Team report. Institutions have undertaken to address applicants on an individual basis and attempt to offer payment plans.

The meeting agreed that this is a moment of opportunity for reinventing and innovation. We need to think deeply and constructively about different models to support an affordable higher education system. The Presidential Commission recently announced is the vehicle for this, and many hopes ride on it.

As has been pointed out elsewhere, our current funding model is dependent on fees, and therefore all students have to pay fees, whether funded by loans, bursaries, or families.

In many institutions registration has started, and we are encouraged by the progress made. The Ministry and Vice-Chancellors call on students to register and start the academic year without disruptions, and on parents and the broader community to support universities to get learning underway as fast as possible. We call on all concerned students, staff, and others who still have unmet demands or grievances and wish to continue protesting, to engage in legitimate and peaceful forms of protest. This will negate the need for an undesirable security presence on our campuses. Violence is unacceptable, disruption of the functioning of institutions and violating the right to learn and work is unacceptable, and damage to property is unacceptable. We can't afford more damage to institutional assets. Our preliminary damage report suggests a estimated R150 million done to public property last year in the course of protests; fortunately this only affects a few institutions. The current cost of security, necessary to protect the functioning of our education system, is exorbitant. We appeal to our groups of protestors to make this expenditure unnecessary, so that it can be better spent on building our education system.

Issued by Ministry.

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