



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Media Briefing Input on Subsidised Free Higher Education for Poor and Working-Class Students

Ministers, senior government officials, representatives of the media, South African citizens; compliments of the New Season! To the Matric class of 2017, we look forward to the announcement of result and extending our heartfelt congratulations to those who are successful.

Today marks approximately twenty days since President Zuma made his historic announcement for free higher education and training for poor and working-class families. This was on the 16 December 2017.

The announcement by the President followed a period that was characterised by debates on what was to be done with the rising cost of higher education in South Africa. This followed the #Fees-Must-Fall campaign of 2015 which spread across the system.

The policy decision communicated by the President to address funding challenges in higher education is proof that education remains an apex priority of Government's pro-poor policies. This is a central pillar in the fight to rid the country of the enduring and debilitating socio-economic legacy of apartheid colonialism, and its resultant triple challenge of the discrimination based on race, gender and class-based poverty, inequality and unemployment.

We are reminded of what our first democratic President, uTata Nelson Mandela, once said on the importance of education:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

“It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

The weak economy, falling tax revenue growth and rising debt have put significant pressure on the public finances. These pressures have limited the space for any new policy commitments. Changes to the PSET system will be undertaken in a fiscally sustainable manner. In practice, this means rolling out reforms at a measured pace, and reprioritising funding within existing budgets.

This policy decision, which will be phased in over a five-year period, entails:

- Extending and strengthening Government’s support for poor students to enter public universities, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges to include the working classes. It does this by lifting the threshold to qualify for financial assistance “to students from South African households with a combined annual income of up to R350 000 per annum”;
- Effectively, changing the definition of the “poor and working class” to include families with household incomes of up to R350 000 per annum;
- Disrupting the vicious cycle of race, gender and class based inequality in educational access and attainment;
- Extending the provision of free higher education and training to the children of the bottom 90% of South African households, provided that they meet the academic admission criteria and requirements of the TVET Colleges or universities, and that they have applied for and been offered a place to study at the institution; noting that there are a defined number of spaces at each institution determined by the institution’s approved enrolment plan;
- Providing full bursaries for tuition and study materials to qualifying poor and working class South African students at public TVET colleges and universities, and subsidised accommodation or transport capped at specific levels for those

who qualify, starting with first time entry students in 2018, and phased-in over a period of five years; and

- Providing for NSFAS packages already allocated to returning existing university students in 2018 to be converted from loans into full bursaries.

NSFAS has already received in excess of 300 000 applications for first year students for the 2018 academic year at universities and TVET colleges.

Government assures South Africans that

- All applicants in possession of a firm offer from a University or TVET College will be assessed for funding using the revised criteria;
- All those in possession of a firm offer from a University or TVET College, but who did not apply for NSFAS funding, will be assisted;
- Students who may not have applied at an institutions or NSFAS and are looking for a space in the post school system will be assisted through the Central Applications Clearing House (CACH).

The phasing in of this policy will ensure the sustainability of Government financial resources whilst simultaneously ensuring that improved access to post-school education and training for students is guaranteed.

This approach allows Government to gradually phase in fully subsidised free higher education for eligible poor and working class students' year-on-year in a fiscally sustainable manner.

In line with Government's commitment to opening up access to opportunities for students in the post-school education and training system, the Department remains committed to the egalitarian principles of equality, fairness, justice and diversity. We believe that this will go a long way in the fight against the perennial challenge of skills deficit that has bedevilled the country since the dawn of our democracy. This investment in our youth will result in the production of a youthful workforce armed with relevant skills critical for our endeavour as a country to create inclusive economic growth.

It is important that this decision includes university and TVET college opportunities. The importance of developing TVET skills to power our economy should not be underestimated.

Students must take into cognisance that universities and TVET colleges registration processes are managed independently from the Department and this is done by individual institutions in accordance with their policies, admission criteria and enrolment plans.

In order to assist learners, make informed career and study choices, the Department operates the Khetha multi-channel platform, which is a career development service. This service provides free access to career information, advice and guidance through telephone, SMS, social media, face-to-face and outreaches to schools among others, e.g. calling 0860 999 0123 for advice or sending an SMS or “Please Call Me” to 072 204 5056.

These services complement the online platforms, which include the newly revamped National Career Advice Portal (<http://ncap.careerhelp.org.za>) and Careerhelp web and mobi sites. These are mainly self-help platforms that provide information on career pathways, occupations and relevant education and training opportunities and facilitate career decision making.

Since the tragic incident at the University of Johannesburg in 2012 where lives were lost, walk in applications at institutions have been discouraged, and through the *Apply Now! Campaign*, which runs every year from March through to September in conjunction with the Khetha Career Advice and DHET Career Development Services, all prospective students have been encouraged to make informed career choices and apply on time.

The Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) service, which started operating in 2013, is a Government online application portal designed for Grade 12 students and other citizens who are seeking admission into post-school education and training for the first time.

It assists prospective students by sharing their National Senior Certificate results with public and private further and higher education institutions across the country, including TVET colleges, universities, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and registered private higher institutions.

Institutions with open study places, technical training opportunities, or apprenticeship slots then make them available to the most suitable applicants on the CACH database.

Students who have been declined offers at universities should approach CACH, which is an ideal route to find a study space that is still available at another institution. CACH also provides a portal for school leavers and other prospective students who may not have completed their schooling to career information, advice and development services.

The Department calls on all young people with the required National Senior Certificate qualifications still seeking opportunities for 2018 to access CACH's easy to use website at: cach.dhet.gov.za or call the toll-free number on 0800 356 635.

It is also possible to send an SMS with a name and ID to 49200 or to find CACH on Facebook: www.facebook.com/CACH_S.A.

CACH opens on 5 January 2018 following the release of the 2017 National Senior Certificate results and closes on 28 February 2018. It will operate daily from 6 am to 7 pm.

We look forward to the announcement of the National Senior Certificate results.

I thank you for your attention.

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