

Minister Naledi Pandor's Statement on 2019 NSFAS Applications

Tuesday, 04 December 2018

National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) applications for the 2019 academic year officially closed on the 30 November 2018. The applications system was open for an extended period until Sunday 2 December 2018.

I am pleased that the 2019 application process has performed well in terms of systems, applications received, as well as user experience.

As all are aware, the start of the 2018 academic year was difficult, with NSFAS facing numerous challenges. These included finalising funding decisions, addressing the 2017 academic year backlog, the non-payment and delays in the payment of allowances, and a weakness in data integration between NSFAS and institutions. The tardiness in resolving these challenges resulted in the

scheme being placed under administration for 12 months, starting in August 2018.

That decision led to the appointment of Dr. Randall Carolissen as the Administrator. I mandated Dr. Carolissen to initially focus on two areas:

- firstly the effective close out of the 2017 and 2018 funding cycles. This was to ensure that all students who had qualified for the bursary scheme were confirmed for funding and had received their allowances; and
- secondly to develop effective plans for the 2019 funding cycle, in collaboration with universities, TVET colleges and my Department, to make sure that student funding for the 2019 academic year works smoothly

I am pleased to report that NSFAS has made good progress in both these areas.

Dr Carolissen has appointed a strong team to assist him. The turnaround strategy to resolve outstanding disbursements for the current year resulted in more than R3.6 billion being disbursed to institutions and a further R10 billion has been unlocked at universities and Colleges since the appointment of the Administrator. The team is focused on resolving all remaining problems.

As we prepare for next year, the 2019 application cycle has proceeded relatively smoothly, with more than 400 000 applications received between the opening of applications on the 3rd September and the closing of applications on the 3rd of December.

On average, NSFAS received more than 3200 applications a day over the period from September to December, with the number reaching as high as 30 000 a day over the last two weeks. Most of the applicants were females (63%) and males made up 37% of applicants. However, it is a concern that only 12% of the applications are from learners who wish to enrol at TVET.

colleges, with the balance of 88% being applications for universities.

A total of 34 413 applications has been from SASSA recipients. You will recall that SASSA recipients automatically qualify in terms of the financial qualification criteria and will be funded if admitted, and register at a TVET college or university.

Of all the applications, the highest number (91 523) was received from the KZN Province. This number represents 45% of the total number of learners that wrote their National Senior Certificate in the province. The lowest number was from Northern Cape with 2573 applications, 18.04% of the total number of learners that wrote in the province.

The success of this current application process can be attributed to a number of factors. These include:

- the revised and easy-to-complete online application system, which allowed applicants to complete an application within five minutes;
- the simplicity of the online and manual form, with fewer fields to fill; and lastly
- accessibility, which has been created through NSFAS' long-standing partnership with the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), allowing students to apply at NYDA centres across the country.

The partnership with NYDA provided a broad footprint in townships, rural and remote areas. Applicants have been able to walk into any NYDA office and be assisted by appointed NSFAS agents to submit their applications. NSFAS is most appreciative of this collaboration and for the support that NYDA has provided.

NSFAS embarked on outreach activities to encourage learners and out of school youth from across the country to apply. These included visits to community centres, shopping malls, high schools, clinics, churches, door-to-

door campaigns and taxi ranks. The latter enabled NSFAS to engage with parents and working youth who commute daily in the early hours, to drive the application message home to their children and siblings. These initiatives were supported by a strong social media campaign run in partnership with other stakeholder platforms such as radio, print, online as well as TVETs and Universities. Partnership with student organisations?

Through this campaign, NSFAS accessed as many people across as wide an area as possible, to ensure that everyone who may have wanted to apply for NSFAS was able to do so.

NSFAS has informed me that feedback from applicants has been positive, especially the fact that applications can be made online with a cellphone, and progress can be tracked on the cellphones. Nevertheless, manual applications are still accepted and have been made in significant numbers in instances where access to technology remains a challenge.

You will also recall that in October the scheme launched a new Service Centre, upgraded with the latest technology, to assist in speeding up the application process and general student enquiries. To date the Service Centre has assisted more than 5115 applicants in Cape Town. NSFAS also placed Regional Managers in each province during the application season to mobilise awareness about the applications process, and conduct activities in townships, rural and remote areas. This initiative has assisted the organisation in closing out the 2017/18 backlog, and processing of new applications.

Currently the scheme is in the process of evaluating all applications received. This evaluation checks whether applicants are eligible for funding. The evaluation also verifies all the data received by students with third parties, i.e. SARS, Home Affairs, etc. During the evaluation NSFAS is able to identify eligible students who have submitted applications but failed to upload some required documents. These students are contacted and requested to submit the outstanding documents so that the applications can be processed.

To qualify for funding a student must meet the financial eligibility criteria and register at an institution for an approved programme. Successful students will receive bursary funding to cover their tuition fee for their registered programme and an allowance for learning materials. They may also qualify for subsidised accommodation and/or a transport allowances where applicable.

NSFAS will communicate to students who meet the financial eligibility criteria and have received an academic offer via SMS or email at the beginning of January, once academic results have been made available to NSFAS. Funding is only confirmed once a student has met the financial eligibility criteria and is formally registered at a public TVET college or university for an approved funded programme. During this process, NSFAS will work closely with institutions to ensure that integration of data is quick and seamless; to allow the timeous release of funds to students, and avoid any repetition of the delays of 2018; where some qualifying students were left

frustrated, homeless, hungry and, without confirmation of their funding.

NSFAS continues to play a critical role in the country as a key institution for Government in redressing past discrimination and ensuring inclusivity and equal access to higher education for students from poor and working-class backgrounds, in line with the National Development Plan.

This year alone, NSFAS disbursed loans and bursaries to the tune of R22 billion for 659 000 (371 368 universities and 288 341 TVET colleges) number of students. This amount is expected to increase next year to approximately R32 billion, which is estimated to fund about 400 920 TVET colleges students and 377 050 University students.

The scheme has to date funded more than 3 million students since its inception, with more than R60 billion invested.

We thank the South African people and government for the continued effort and commitment in ensuring that there are adequate financial resources to meet the ever-increasing needs, as we continue to work together to ensure a bright future for our youth.

Thank you