MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: Wednesday, 24 March 2021

TO: All media

ATTENTION: News Editors/ Reporters

MINISTER NZIMANDE REFUTES CLAIMS BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENT UNION THAT HE REFUSES TO MEET THEM

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation Dr Blade Nzimande dismisses claims by the South African Union of Student (SAUS) that he does not want to engage them on their demands, as baseless and untrue.

The Minister has been having meetings with the student leadership prior to the previous two media briefings he held on funding decisions and the commencement of the 2021 academic year. Furthermore, the Minister has responded to the written demands by SAUS as sent to him a while ago.

In addition, Minister Nzimande has asked universities to give him a detailed breakdown of the scale and nature of the student debt by the end of the week, in order to facilitate further engagements on this matter.

Yesterday, Minister Nzimande engaged with SAUS through the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology.

The Minister also confirms that he has a scheduled meeting this coming weekend with the leadership of SAUS.

As a result, the Minister urges the student leadership to desist from manufacturing non-existent reasons to justify the continuation of the shutdown.

Minister Nzimande acknowledges the general state of the South African economy and severe constraints imposed by both the strained fiscal situation and the impact of COVID-19 on the funding of critical aspects of the post-school system, including university subsidies and student financial aid.

It is against this important background that Minister Nzimande and the Vice Chancellors through Universities South Africa (USAf) affirmed their commitment to immediately implement sustainable, differential debt relief measures in all our 26 universities.

“Firstly, all 26 universities have committed to using several debt relief mechanisms on a case by case basis to enable academically-deserving students to register and complete their studies without undermining the underlying financial stability of each institution,” said Minister Nzimande.
The Minister said specific attention is being given to the plight of senior students who are NSFAS bursary recipients (before the 2018 NSFAS policy framework) and ‘missing middle’ income students, where severe financial difficulties may be experienced.

Minister Nzimande has agreed in the meeting held with Vice-Chancellors from all 26 universities that they will continue to have ongoing engagements with student leadership structures at institutional level to find solutions to the matters affecting registration of students, including financial matters. As a result of these institutional engagements, some universities have reached agreement with their student leadership.

“It has been agreed that a task team will be established urgently to begin work on a longer-term solution to support a comprehensive and sustainable student financial aid system. This process will aim to address both the challenges that are likely to face the system in 2022, and the development of a long term, sustainable student funding model and ecosystem,” said Minister Nzimande.

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