

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR
BLADE NZIMANDE STATEMENT ON THE POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING SECTOR STATE OF READINESS FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2023

24 January 2023 - GCIS – Pretoria

Programme Director Mr Ishmael Mnisi
Deputy Minister, Mr Buti Manamela;
Director-General of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Dr Nkosinathi Sishi;
DDGs Present;
Mr Board Chair of NSFAS Ernest Khosa, and CEO Mr Andile Nongogo;
Chairpersons and CEOs of all our entities;
Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, TVET and CET Principals;
Labour Unions;
Student formations;
Members of the media;
Fellow South Africans

We welcome you all to our first media briefing of the year 2023. I called this briefing to share with the public our readiness for the opening of the 2023 Post School Education and Training academic year.

Allow me to take this opportunity to congratulate the 2022 matriculation class for attaining 80.1% national Matric pass rate.

I am happy that Sixty five percent of the 219 597 distinctions obtained by the matriculants were in critical subjects such as accounting, business studies, economics, mathematics, and physical science.

This means that we are systematically addressing all imperatives related to the social justice principles, especially equity and redress.

I also welcome the good news that out of the 2022 matric class, 278,815 students achieved a bachelor's pass, 197,357 (26.7%) achieved a diploma pass, and 14.9% (108,159) achieved a higher certificate pass, regardless of the fact that this class faced significant challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic and load shedding.

I must indicate that the matric pass rates for each province will be a helpful planning instrument for the post school education and training sector for the further allocation of resources, particularly for our technical vocational education and training sector and our community colleges.

I also congratulate all our PSET students who also wrote their 2022 examinations at our TVET colleges, Community Colleges and Universities.

I also wish to take this opportunity to also urge those who have not successfully completed the requirements for their 2022 academic programmes not to give up on improving their education and training in order to improve their life chances and career prospects in a changing world.

The PSET system offers a range of differentiated pathways to students including opportunities for training, learnerships and internships.

Our skills development system will be offering more opportunities through our SETAs, including but not limited to learnerships, which provide both theory and practical workplace training, including apprenticeship (artisanal trades).

May I also take this opportunity to further pass our condolences to men and women, both students and staff that we have lost in our sector due to various reasons. Our thoughts are with their families, friends and colleagues.

The recent incidents include the assassination of Mr Mboneli Vesele, the Executive Protection Officer to the University of Fort Hare and the killing of Mabutho Jenamo, a Community Education College student who was attending his classes at Reneilwe Community Learning Centre in Mamelodi East in Gauteng.

Ladies and gentlemen

Before I provide further details on our state of readiness for the academic year 2023, let me indicate that our sector is working on a sector-based strategy and plan to respond to the negative effects of loadshedding and the resurgence of COVID-19 Omicron sub-variant named XBB.1.5 (“Kraken”).

I will also briefly share our response on gender based violence with the PSET sector.

On Loadshedding

Many are concerned about the impact of load shedding on the PSET system.

Based on the data submitted by Universities, it is clear that there are different strategies being considered by our universities. Both my Departments of Higher Education and Training and Science and Innovation will be establishing a working group consisting of our universities and TVET colleges to ensure that an inclusive approach is adopted to allow for collective beneficiation from the local Intellectual Property (IP) efforts developed by my Department of Science and Innovation and its entities.

I will update the public on these effort following the conclusion of our internal consultation processes.

On Covid-19 “Kraken” variant

Similarly, we are also working with institutions in the PSET sector to monitor and manage public health protocols, as advised by the Department of Health, to ensure maximum safety on our campuses and sites of learning.

Over the last three years, HIGHER HEALTH has played an instrumental role, within the context of the policies of both the DHET and the Department of Health, towards putting protocols, procedures, systems and capacity to deal with the Covid-19

pandemic. All these instruments remain active should we need to apply them in response to this new variant.

On Gender based Violence

We have noted incidents of gender-based violence on campuses and this has in many cases resulted in female students being brutally killed. The brutal murder of Nosicelo Mtebeni, Uyinene Mrwetyana, Precious Ramabulana, Jesse Hess, and many more others highlights the vulnerability of female students to gender based violence. All our institutions working with HIGHER HEALTH seek to provide safe workplaces and learning spaces for all staff and students in our institutions.

HIGHER HEALTH is currently implementing programmes towards addressing the challenges of Sexual and Gender Based Violence, within the PSET system. These programmes are aligned to the DHET “Policy Framework to Address Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the Post-School Education and Training System”.

Through HIGHER HEALTH we have established a multi sectoral PSET gender-based violence technical Task team chaired by Professor LenkaBula, to ensure the effective implementation of the DHET Policy Framework.

In addition, I have established a Ministerial Task Team on sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the university sector. This MTT is chaired by Professor Sibongile Muthwa. The report of the MTT was submitted to me for consideration and I will soon be releasing it to the public.

As part of dealing with gender-based violence in our institutions, I will also be launching the “Transforming MENTALities Initiative,” which will be a multistakeholder partnership within the PSET, with a particular focus on mobilising men in our sector to be part of championing a world free of gender biases, stereotypes, violence and discrimination.

TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

On 2022 TVET examinations

For our 2022 National Certificate (Vocational) [NC(V)] Level 2-4 examinations, a total of 166 184 students enrolled for examinations, out of which 133 442 candidates wrote the November 2022 examinations.

Although the total number of candidates who wrote the 2022 examination decreased by 4 909 (3,7%) compared to the cohort that wrote the 2021 examination. This is a matter of concern to the Ministry as our country needs much greater throughput from this crucial sector.

Our report also indicates that more female candidates (72,1%) participated in the November 2022 examination than male candidates (27,9%).

Our TVET candidates in the 15-18 age group represented only 1,5% while those in the 19-24 age group made up 64,7%. The candidates in the 25+ age group comprised 33,7%.

This distribution of candidates according to age groups has been stable over a period of two years.

In so far as the student percentage distribution per province in 2022:

- KwaZulu-Natal had the highest wrote percentage proportion of (21.8%);
- Gauteng followed by (19.9%),
- Limpopo (17.2%);
- Eastern Cape (12.4%);
- The lowest percentage of those wrote was recorded in Free State with (4.9%) and followed by Northern Cape (0.9%).

We had a total of 898 901 subject entries enrolled for the November 2022 NC (V) examination which decreased by approximately 4.6% compared to those of November 2021.

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A total of 218 262 candidate subject entries were enrolled for the November 2022 examinations – 136 301 on N2 and 81 961 on N3.

The number of candidate subject entries enrolled for the 2022 examinations increased by 31 419 (14.4%) compared to those of 2021.

Attending to queries relating to outstanding examinations results and certification

To lodge any TVET examinations or certification related enquiry, the exam centres and/or candidates are encouraged to make use of the DHET Exams e-query solution for colleges on www.eservices.gov.za.

The main benefits of this solution amongst other are exam centre/candidate can manage their query, life cycle and availability of online service 24/7.

I would also like to appeal to all our prospective students who are still seeking spaces within our TVET colleges for Entry Level Programmes (ELP) to contact their colleges of choice for available enrollment spaces for the academic year 2023.

On commencement of classes

With the final set of results received on the 17 January 2022 classes commenced yesterday, Monday, 23rd January 2023.

On number of enrolments

Our TVET colleges planned headcount enrolment for 2023 is 497 032 for the ministerial approved programmes with additional 59 383 headcount enrolment for

programmes that is funded through other funding sources, thus bringing the total planned TVET enrolment for the academic year 2023 to 556 415.

We acknowledge the fact that this figure is still substantially lower for us to attain the 2,5 million students' enrolment plan in TVET colleges by 2030 as projected by the National Development Plan. We are however working hard with our plans to ensure that we accelerate the growth of our TVET sector.

Let me also indicated that we are standardizing our registration and admission processes in our TVET college to do away with different processes which has been applied by our colleges. This will include standardization in the processes of issuing of certificates.

This standardization process will also help us in the migration from manual to online registration processes in all our TVET colleges.

We have also witnessed student growth on several colleges who have now begun to embrace the use of technology in their enrolment processes and reducing the number of walk-ins in TVET colleges.

Ten (10) of our colleges will also be introducing a new programme in Robotics in this academic year. This is part of our curriculum transformation strategy for the TVET sector in ensuring that our colleges remain responsive to the needs of a changing economy.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Universities commencement of the academic year

University registration for the academic year 2023 commenced from the 16th January and is expected to close on the 20th February. However, there will be several of our universities that will allow late registrations. These universities include CPUT, DUT, MUT, RU, UFH, WSU, TUT and UNIZULU.

Prospective students are advised to continue to liaise with the universities of their choice through their communication channels.

On 2023 University enrolments

The overall total enrolments within the public university sector for the 2023 academic year is projected to provide 1 112 439 spaces, that is an additional 41 545 spaces. This is an increment from the 1 070 894 in the 2022 academic year. This illustrates that our university sector is steadily growing.

In terms of the gender profile of our enrolments from the 2021 audited data, we have 655 427 female and 412 428 male students.

In the 2023 academic year, our first-time entering enrolments have been projected at 208 299 nationally. Sixty-nine thousand and sixty-nine (69 069) of these first-time

entering enrolments will be within scarce skills areas and have been projected as follows:

- Engineering: 17 085
- Life and Physical Science: 17 584
- Animal Sciences: 985
- Veterinary Sciences: 209
- Human Health: 10 418
- Teacher Education: 22 788

A considerable portion of the spaces within scarce skills areas require a National Senior Certificate (NSC) Mathematics mark of at least 60%.

As a result, through my Department of Science and Innovation, we have developed collaborations with Provincial Departments of Education to support mathematics, science and technology education (MSTE).

This intervention will ensure that we increase the number of learners passing Grade 12 in mathematics, science and technology education.

To ensure that the entire public sector university system is developed, we are intensifying the implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) to improve student success, quality of teaching and learning, including research and to support curriculum renewal in all our universities.

Last year (2022), I also launched the Professor Sibusiso Bhengu Development programme to strengthen our historically disadvantaged universities.

Whilst we urge students to also consider the TVET Colleges as an option, we have started considering the blended learning mode as an alternative to accommodate more students.

In this regard, I have commissioned the Council on Higher Education to conduct a study on blended learning. This mode of delivery will enable more access to higher education. This may assist with achieving the National Development Plan goal of 1.6 million enrolments in our universities by 2030.

Having said that I must applaud our universities for their achievement in exceeding the targets for the veterinary science, animal sciences and teacher education areas. Well done for this achievement.

Central Applications Clearing House (CACH)

Another initiative introduced in my Department is the Central Applications Service (CAS) system.

CAS is central to improving data management for enrolments and is at an advanced stage. We have now entered the piloting stage to stress test the system.

Five (5) Universities have participated in the pilot phase. They include the Tshwane University of Technology, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Vaal University of Technology, University of Limpopo and the University of the Western Cape. The next piloting phase will include Rhodes University, NorthWest University and the Central University of Technology.

To further enable access to all our institutions, we will be opening our Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) on the 27th January 2023.

CACH will close on the 31st March 2023 and the services are available from Mondays to Friday between 8am to 6pm and Saturday from 8am to 2pm.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Our Community Colleges re-opened on the 11th January 2023 for inland provinces and on the 18th January 2023 for coastal provinces.

I am delighted to report that through our Community Colleges this year will be introducing a new programme on Civic Education.

The Civic Education Programme will teach the importance of protecting and supporting South Africa's democracy and fostering better understanding of citizens roles and responsibilities. Some of the topics covered will include: Human rights, Constitutional rights, Voting as a Right and Responsibility, Countering Racism, Stigma and Discrimination.

Community Colleges also offer the Senior Matric (Amended) and the Second Chance Matric Programme for those learners who may have failed Grade 12 or learners who wish to improve some of the Grade 12 subjects. This is done in partnership with the Department of Basic Education.

We will also be progressively introducing skills, occupational, learnerships and non-formal programmes through funding support from the National Skills Fund (NSF) and our Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

Lastly, our Community Colleges will also be introducing a Digital Literacy programmes as part of the National Electronic Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) partnership for Community College lecturers.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Our skills development system has planned for the current financial year to open about 107 000 workplace-based learning opportunities, inclusive of learnerships in various sectors of our economy during this financial year.

We are planning to increase these workplace-based learning opportunities from 1 April 2023 to 110 500 to benefit, in the main, our young people, those between the ages of 15 to 24 years old, our Matriculation Class of 2022 will greatly benefit in these interventions.

Currently our target on skills programs in various sectors of the economy, is to have 148 000 beneficiaries. This target will be increased from 1st April 2023 to 149 000.

Currently for those entering artisanal trades, we have a target of 22 000 beneficiaries, which will be increased from 1 April 2023 to 23 000 beneficiaries.

Central to the NSF skills development funding program in 2023/24 will be the acceleration of skills development funding through massification in agricultural, digital and information technology programs and skills in small business development and entrepreneurship in partnership with other government departments.

All these programmes will be coordinated through the District Development Model, as well as making use of accredited Skills Development Providers.

We are still on track in funding artisan development programs and the NSF will continue to fund them.

The NSF will also post new requests for proposal from qualifying Skills Development Providers to carry out and support the placement of learners for work integrated learning, in particular targeting the NEET group.

All these skills development funding efforts will release an estimated 3 billion rand from the NSF to support beneficiaries in agricultural, digital and information technology programs and skills in small business development. These investments exclude our investment in artisan development and other support skills development programmes.

ON BOGUS COLLEGES

I want to once more send my warning to unsuspecting students and parents to be aware of what we call bogus colleges, which mislead members of the public through false promising advertisements which illegally promise to be offering both nationally and internationally recognised qualifications.

I request the public to be vigilant and not fall for fake operators who are not registered and recognized by the South African qualifications system. We urge all parents and students to check on registered colleges in our DHET website www.dhet.gov.za.

STUDENT DEBT

Before I can provide details on our National Student Financial Aid support, I want to indicate that the extent of student debt poses a threat to future sustainability of our higher education institutions.

Current student debt is at about the R16.5+ billion. This cost of debt is about R1,5 billion per annum which could be directed towards infrastructure development and/or growing the academic system.

This is the reason that we are working hard to conclude the consultations on the Comprehensive Student Funding Model.

In the interim, NSFAS has agreed with all our institutions to allow all the confirmed NSFAS funded students to register for the 2023 academic year. This arrangement also applies to all students who qualify under the Historic Debt Funds and Close Out Report.

As a result, we appeal to institutions to register these students and allow administrative processes between NSFAS and the institutions to continue.

Missing middle funding

The issue of the missing middle is being finalized within the Comprehensive Funding Model process. Working within the policy framework we will avail loans and bursaries and direct these efforts toward students located within the scarce skills categories.

THE NATIONAL STUDENT FINANCIAL AID SCHEME (NSFAS)

Ladies and gentlemen

The NSFAS applications for the funding for the 2023 academic year opened on 28 September 2022 and will close on the 31st January 2023.

I am happy to report that we will be able to fund all qualifying students on the DHET bursary scheme who have been admitted for funded programmes at public TVET colleges and universities in 2023.

As of Friday, 20 January 2023, a total of 1 131 419 applications have been received through the scheme's online application portal and 156 700 of these applications are from SASSA beneficiaries.

All SASSA beneficiaries have received instant funding approval, pending registration at any of our public universities or TVET colleges.

NSFAS will release application results for those who applied for funding for the first time and returning students on 06 February 2023 while the funded list for continuing students has been released today, the 24th January.

It is important for unsuccessful applicants to note that they have the opportunity to appeal such NSFAS decisions by submitting relevant supporting documents between the 20th of January and the 20th of February 2023.

All application decisions, including the appeal option and appeal processes will be available to applicants through the myNSFAS portal accessible via the NSFAS website; www.nsfas.org.za

To cater for the first few months of their academic journey while applicants wait for their application results, NSFAS will make upfront payments to institutions to cover for cost related to registration, tuition fees and living allowances.

As I indicated earlier, NSFAS is currently finalising this upfront payment schedule for payment to universities and TVET Colleges and payments will be made by end of January.

This therefore means that all NSFAS funded students will be registered by all the institutions without paying an upfront registration fee.

Those who have applied for NSFAS funding for 2023 are encouraged to log onto their myNSFAS accounts to track their applications.

The good news is that NSFAS applicants can access their application updates at the tip of their fingers through a new WhatsApp line and a USSD code.

You can add NSFAS on WhatsApp 078 519 8006 Or dial *120*67327 to track your 2023 application status. This is NSFAS' way of simplifying the lives of applicants and students.

Let me also remind all those who have not applied for NSFAS funding that they still have until the 31st of January to apply for funding.

As of 13 January 2023, NSFAS has deployed its staff members to institutions across the country to assist with funding related issues, data exchange processes with institutions to ensure seamless data integration and the registration of students onto new NSFAS systems.

I have also urged NSFAS to drastically improve its communications systems and urgently build capacity for prompt responses to all NSFAS enquiries. Not a single NSFAS query must be left unresponded to.

I also wish to use this opportunity to warn all those who are improperly benefitting from NSFAS to desist from doing so as we intend intensify chasing on them and on identifying them. We will take criminal actions against them.

I have urged NSFAS, working together with the DHET, to intensify efforts in identifying all the crooks who are defrauding NSFAS and benefitting illegally from its funds.

On the 2023 NSFAS Eligibility Criteria and Conditions for Financial Aid

With regard to the 2023 NSFAS Eligibility Criteria and Conditions for Financial Aid, let me upfront indicate that we have significantly increased the TVET colleges allowances for students.

- TVET college students studying occupational Programmes will be funded for the cost of tuition for the duration of the qualification.

- TVET College students who are registered on an occupational qualification may qualify for allowances ONLY if in simulated training.
- It must however be noted that students registered on an occupational qualification that has an employment contract do not qualify for NSFAS allowances.
- TVET college graduates will be funded for a university undergraduate qualification regardless of the benefit that they would have derived from the application of the N+ rule at a TVET college level. (On condition they did not exceed the TVET N+ Rule)

On academic eligibility

- As of 2023, First Time Entering Students (FTENs) must achieve a course credit pass rate of 50%;
- As of this year (2023) continuing university students must achieve a progressive course credit pass rate of 55%. It must also be noted that all returning University students must meet ongoing academic eligibility requirements in order to remain funded by NSFAS. It must also be noted that academic progression criteria will increase from 55% to 60% over time.
- The N+ Rule for distance university students will be reviewed as of 2024;

Let me also indicate that we have had very candid consultation engagements with USAF, SAUS, DVC's academic and Registrars of universities to determine the 2023 academic progression rates.

On Allowances

- An inflation linked increase of 5% on allowances has been effected for our universities and TVET colleges on student allowances, with the accommodation allowance increased by 7% and capped at R45 000 per student per annum.
- This year (2023), a Living allowance of R6000 per annum (distributed monthly) will be introduced for the first time for our TVET College students.

I must say that this has been one of our commitments as government to ensure we truly and systematically transform our TVET colleges into institution of choice.

- We are also removing a 40km distance control for TVET college students replacing it with a more equitable 10km radius. This also applies to our universities.
- NSFAS will also administer allowances for TVET College students with Disability similar to universities. The DHET Disability Grant for TVET Colleges will also be redirected to NSFAS.

Additionally, NSFAS has also embarked on regional engagements and training sessions for Financial Aid Officers (FAO's) and Student Representative Councils (SRC's) in order to ensure that they are equipped with relevant information and training to assist students on campus during the registration period and beyond.

On Student-Centred Model and NSFAS Student Accommodation Portal

For the past two years, NSFAS has made strides in its implementation of the Student-Centred Model and two of the main initiatives aimed at this is the implementation of the NSFAS Direct payment solution, better known as the NSFAS Bank Account, and the development NSFAS Student Accommodation Portal.

Now this is very important for all students to pay close attention to:

Through the NSFAS Bank account, NSFAS seeks to pay all beneficiaries allowances directly without any so-called 'middleman' (intermediary).

After a beneficiary has been onboarded, they will receive a card (virtual or physical) to perform most transactions as we do with mainstream bank accounts.

Beneficiaries who have not been onboarded onto the new payment system are urged to sign in to enable NSFAS to pay their allowances.

NSFAS student accommodation

There is a shortage of over 400 000 beds for student accommodation for public tertiary institutions, with rural based Universities and TVET Colleges being the most affected.

The shortage of student accommodation exposes students to immense vulnerabilities, such as, serious crimes and gender-based violence (GBV). Some students stay in facilities that are un conducive to performance in their academic work.

All these work against the Department's objective to skill our youth and consequently stimulate their entry into the mainstream of our economy.

To address this challenge, the Department of Higher Education and Training and its entity, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), will employ the allocated budget for infrastructure and student accommodation to partner with investors and property developers, to stimulate the rapid construction of university residences in a manner that will enable the state to eventually own and control these assets.

Whilst NSFAS processes are underway, all institutions will apply their own existing process to allocate accommodation, this includes both universities and TVET colleges.

The new reforms by NSFAS, will not apply in this current registration period. NSFAS will give institutions three months' notice prior to the implementation of the new accommodation dispensation.

It must be noted that NSFAS opened the new accommodation portal on the 9th December 2022 and forty-four (44) Accreditation Agents were appointed to start with the accreditation of accommodation.

Since the opening of the portal, there are 1120 accommodation providers that have applied on the site, with 574 272 beds listed.

I therefore want to urge institutions and private accommodation providers to continue to apply for accreditation in the NSFAS-portal.

NRF POST GRADUATE FUNDING

In order to ensure that the children of the working class and the poor are supported to pursue their post graduate studies, the National Research Fund will prioritise all NSFAS funded undergraduate students who meet the criteria for admission to pursue their honours, master's and doctoral studies in all areas of Science, Engineering, Technology, Social Sciences, and Humanities.

The Full Cost of Study (FCS) or Partial Cost of Study (PCS) funding will be awarded to South African citizens and Permanent Residents only, who are either financially needy (i.e., those whose combined household family income is less than or equal to R350 000 per annum), living with a disability or exceptional academic achievers.

Let me indicate that all NRF continuing students who are eligible for a second or third year of funding must submit a Progress Report and not a new application.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me thank all stakeholders within the post school education and training sector with whom we have been consulting in preparation for the 2023 academic year. They include SAUS, SATVETSA, SACPO, USAF and Labour Unions. Thank you very much for the guidance and support that you continue to provide to my department.

I also thank my Deputy Minister, our Director General, DDGs and the entire DHET team, NSFAS and Higher Health for ensuring that we continue to work on the ground with all our stakeholders in order to realise our plans.

Lastly my gratitude goes to President Cyril Ramaphosa and all my Cabinet colleagues who continue to support our sector's dynamic growth.

Thanks to all our parents as well.

May I wish all our institutions well for this academic year.

I thank you all.