

Higher Education clarifies NSFAS funding reconfiguration

The Department of Higher Education and Training says while the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is reconfiguring its funding processing for 2019, planning for the year hasn't stopped.



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Speaking to *SAnews* on Tuesday morning, department spokesperson Lunga Ngqengelele clarified misleading media reports that funding applications had been halted following a request by Minister Naledi Pandor.

Ngqengelele said Pandor had on 15 July written to the NSFAS board requesting that the processing of applications for funding for next year be placed on hold until the 2017 and 2018 backlogs had been cleared. However, Ngqengelele said, planning for next year would continue.

This was due to the fact that a number of students had not received funding for the past two years.

“It’s the processing and not the planning; that was the Minister’s letter,” he said.

Pandor, he said, had made the request to ensure that the 2017 and 2018 backlogs were resolved.

“This is done so that come 2019, the processes are clean and clear in terms of dispersing funds to students and we won’t have a situation in 2019 or mid-2019 where some students are yet to receive their funds.

“That’s what necessitated the Minister’s request.”

Pandor has also identified four areas that require the intervention of NSFAS, and she has also made suggestions to address these areas. The Minister wants NSFAS to ensure that there is an urgent resolution to the integration of registration and funding data between NSFAS and the universities and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, in consultation with the institutions.

NSFAS also needs to make sure that bursary agreements, with the accurate information, are signed urgently.

“They needed to be reviewed to ensure that they were compliant to all legal and policy prescripts,” Ngqengelele said.

The third directive from the Minister is for students to immediately receive confirmation of their funding if data relating to their application has been integrated.

Pandor wants granted funds to be dispersed to students without delay. This is, however, subject to control and measures to ensure that the correct students are paid, Ngqengelele said.

Pandor had in May asked the department’s Director-General, Gwebinkundla Qonde, to lead a team of senior managers to interact with NSFAS on a regular basis to resolve these matters.

“The Minister is of the view that even one student not receiving their funding is one too many,” he said.

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