

NSFAS N+2 rule still stands

Higher Education, Science and Innovation Minister Blade Nzimande has reiterated that the department is not going to change the stipulated number of years within which National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) beneficiaries are expected to finish their studies.



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The NSFAS N+2 rule, which is part of the core funding policy of the scheme for students registered before 2018, enforces the N+2 rule, meaning that students have an additional two years to complete their degree and ceases to fund a student for longer than this period.

During a virtual media briefing on the progress in the implementation of Covid-19 measures held in Tshwane on Tuesday, Nzimande said following extensive improvements at NSFAS, the application of the rule has become more efficient in 2020, and a significant number of students were found to have exceeded the N+2 rule in terms of their years in the system.

“While the N+2 rule for NSFAS students registered prior to 2018 has always been in place, its application has been erratic, due to data gaps, inadequacies and constraints between NSFAS and institutions. This means that as a direct consequence of the implementation of the rule, several students were unfunded.

“After I had requested NSFAS to look into this matter and check if indeed some of the issues raised by the students could have some validity, we discovered that there are cases where the application of the rule may have been applied inappropriately or in an unjust manner,” the Minister said.

This included the following three areas:

- Students who may have de-registered in the first semester for prior years of study for financial or other reasons, yet the academic year is counted as time spent in the system;
- Students whose academic progression has been affected by medical or psycho-social challenges, and where evidence supported by medical certificates and other evidence has been provided as part of the appeals process; and
- Students who have exceeded the N+2 rule based on time in the system, but who are currently in their final year of study and will graduate in 2020.

Nzimande said NSFAS has received approximately 9,000 continuing student appeals, many of which relate to the application of the N+2 rule.

“NSFAS will look at the above three categories of students in considering the appeals, in line with the factors I have mentioned and address all deserving cases appropriately. However, the mechanisms to addressing the aspects of the N+2 rule that may have been unfair to some of our students will go a long way to ensure that those students who were unjustly excluded are considered,” Nzimande said.

Zero-rating of local education content

Giving an update on zero-rating PSET institutions, Nzimande reported that Higher Education and Communications and Digital Technologies Departments have concluded the negotiation on standardisation of pricing and conditions with the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) (excluding Telkom Mobile) on R65 for 10GB anytime and 20GB night time data for three months for NSFAS and Funza Lushaka students.

This is being implemented in universities and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

The Minister has also made available a table with information on the percentage of institutions that are zero-rated by the different MNOs and Internet service providers.

“The total number of sites submitted to the MNOs for zero-rating PSET institutions is now 586. The full list of sites that have been zero-rated has been published on the individual institutional and departmental websites,” the Minister said.

Zero rating means that access to institutional websites will be free, although some of the embedded content like YouTube and videos may be charged for.

Procurement of electronic devices

Meanwhile, the department will by end of this week commence with the central procurement of electronic devices, particularly laptops, through an open tender system.

Nzimande said the department has agreed with National Treasury that, given the huge amounts involved in the central acquisition of outstanding tablets, it is better to follow proper procedures than take short cuts, even if there is some delay, so as to properly account for spending of taxpayers’ money.

“We are also finalizing the process of verifying which NSFAS students already have acquired devices, in order to avoid mistakenly issuing some students with more than one device per student. We urge for patience from both parents, staff and students,” Nzimande said.

He said further pronouncements would be made, as soon as service provider/s have been appointed and give clear timelines for the commencement of the distribution of outstanding gadgets to all the institutions, as per the NSFAS guidelines.

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