

Universities: give us R2bn more or else

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Thousands of students will be barred from studying at university next year if the government fails to find an extra R2bn for those who qualify for funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme.



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This is in addition to the R1.9bn that the state will pay universities to cover the shortfall of the 0% fee increase and the R2.5bn the fiscus is scheduled to pay for outstanding fees owed by 71753 students for 2013 to 2015.

NSFAS chief executive Msulwa Daka admitted on Saturday, 19 December, that the R7.8bn student funding earmarked for the 26 universities for next year, up from R7.4bn this year, was "definitely not enough".

"We need another R2bn."

The R7.8bn allocation was expected to fund roughly 190,000 students who qualified for financial assistance. Daka did not know how many more students, eligible for aid, would miss out.

The scheme sent out letters to universities this week confirming their share of funding. But universities are not happy. Dr Prins Nevhutalu, vice-chancellor of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, said he would get R237m from the scheme, which was less than in 2015. "We hope there's going to be a correction because we don't believe that our

numbers of students have gone down."

He was expecting R78.4m from the government to make up for the shortfall from the 0% fee increase.

Professor Mahlo Mokgalong, vicechancellor of the University of Limpopo, said his NSFAS allocation was going up by just 4%. The university received R270m this year and had applications for scheme funding from 6000 students. "The government must come to the party and increase that funding," he said.

Mokgalong said the state had promised to pay him R50m towards the 0% fee increase.

Professor Adam Habib, vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, said he was promised R183m for next year, but this did not include the Basic Education Department's Funza Lushaka bursaries for trainee teachers.

This year his university received R179m, which was used to provide funding to about 3000 students.

"It does seem as if the increase is less than inflation . We have to get an explanation from NSFAS."

He confirmed that of the more than 70,000 students who applied for admission next year, 17,000 also applied for funding.

"We are expecting that ultimately the R183m will go towards assisting only 3000 of those eligible for financial assistance."

But Habib said that the scheme's funding was only one among a collection of other funds that the state was making available. The government is also making money available to cover historical debt. He confirmed Wits would get R146m from the government as compensation for the 0% fee increase.

Daca confirmed that R1.4bn of the R7.8bn earmarked for universities next year would be paid in January so that students who qualified for NSFAS funding did not have to pay registration fees.

"It would be unfair of universities to say they are not happy with their allocations. They are getting money from the Department of Higher Education to compensate them for the 0% fee increase.

"The allocations that came now in December are not everything. They're going to get more money from funds administered by NSFAS. It's premature for universities to say in December they are unhappy with their allocations," he said.

Source: Sunday Times