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PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES WILL NOT ALLOW WALK-IN APPLICATIONS IN JANUARY; STUDENTS WHO DID NOT PREVIOUSLY QUALIFY FOR FINANCIAL AID AND WHO NOW QUALIFY ON THE BASIS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ANNOUNCEMENT MUST SUBMIT THEIR DETAILS ONLINE TO THE DHET'S CENTRAL APPLICATIONS CLEARING HOUSE (CACH).

Following the announcement made by President Zuma on the 16th of December 2017 about what he called 'free education for the poor and working class', Universities SA (USAf) met with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and with the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to discuss the implications of that announcement. Much to our dismay, we discovered at that meeting that the decision of the government to implement the new system was a *fait accompli*. Our task then, as universities, was to work out how to implement the new NSFAS provisions in ways that are most effective and beneficial to the students and potential students.

One of the outcomes of that meeting was that since applications to all 26 universities had closed towards the end of 2017, no 'walk-in' applications would be accepted. Universities would abide by their enrolment plans and targets which are agreed between each university and the DHET. However, we understood clearly that there are first year students who didn't previously qualify for financial aid but who now do, under the new NSFAS dispensation. A clearly defined pathway should be established for such potential candidates.

At that meeting it was decided that such students, whether they had applied to NSFAS or not, **MUST SUBMIT THEIR DETAILS ONLINE TO THE DHET'S Central Applications Clearing House (CACH)**. This system has been established specifically to address the placement of students who did not apply to any university but who now qualify and wish to be considered for an academic space. The URL for the CACH website is www.cach.dhet.gov.za

We therefore call on students and parents who are anxious to determine if they qualify for the new NSFAS dispensation to follow this route.

Meanwhile, USAf is deeply concerned by the call made by some political leaders for students to simply turn up at universities for enrolment without having made appropriate prior arrangements for their admission. This is unfortunate as it may result in a replay of events with potential to cause injury to students and their families. We recall with deep anxiety the event at the University of Johannesburg in January 2012, which resulted in the tragic death of a parent.

South Africa's 26 public universities were taken by surprise by the announcement made by President Zuma on the 16th of December 2017. We have raised our concerns about the timing of that announcement and the absence of a clear implementation strategy, implementation plan and adequate roll-out time for such a significant development in the funding of our public higher education system. Ideally, we would have liked a year to roll out the new system; instead we have two to three weeks. We have repeatedly raised our concerns about the use of the student fee issue as a political football. This is not just disingenuous but also opens the way for the issue to be used for purely political purposes as we have just seen.

We therefore implore all political parties and student leaders to adopt a responsible approach to this new development in the public higher education sector and to work in concert with the universities in addressing the challenges that may engulf the start of the new academic year in 2018.

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