

16 February 2023

**Update on Student Debt Working Group
&
NSFAS capped accommodation allowance.**

Dear Students

We trust that you are well and safe. The Student's Representative Council (SRC) would like to provide the student community with an update on the Student Debt Working Group and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) capped accommodation allowance.

Student Debt Working Group

On the 4th of February 2023 the Registrar's Division released communication regarding important information on registration. The working group had its first sitting on the 19th of January 2023. It was during this meeting that the members of the SRC, that serve on this committee, were told that the form that had been released at the beginning of January was missing important information. Therefore, the form then had to be modified and redistributed to the student community.

We would like to express that the members that serve on this committee took a proactive approach last year and tried to begin the conversation around financial exclusion. The response that they were given was rather disappointing. Certain stakeholders in the institution told the members that this would only be dealt with in January, which we believe was unreasonable due to the nature of the registration period. Due to the delay in only convening at the beginning of this year, we now find ourselves in this position that could have been prevented in December.

To date there are a total of 514 students that applied for assistance from the working group. These applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis with input from the Undergraduate Bursaries Office, Postgraduate Office, Student Fees Office, and the Student's Representative Council, who are all represented on the Working Group. To date the committee has reviewed 255 cases of which:

1. 139 applicants that met the criteria, and had a debt of R45k and below, have had their applications approved. Their debt was paid by the Centre for Undergraduate Bursaries and Loans.
2. 31 applicants had not met the criteria and their applications were unfortunately unsuccessful. Applicants that have been rejected are rejected on the basis of they did not pass 50 percent of their modules, are above the R600k cap and are not within their N+ years.
3. 60 applicants met the criteria, however their debt was above R45k. This is being dealt with by the committee.
4. 53 applicants met the criteria, however their debt is above 100k.
 - To add on to this point, the committee only has a budget of 3.4 million rand and the amount of money that is required to assist students is sitting at just over 18

million rand. It is also important to note that this committee solely relies on donations.

- Therefore, the committee did not just decline these students' applications, the problem they are facing is insufficient funds. The committee is still trying to find ways of sourcing more funds.

All those that have been approved must please go to Admin A to check if your block has been lifted. The SRC does **NOT** provide any letter regarding cases that have been approved. Responses are coming out in rounds after a certain number of applicants have been reviewed. Please do not panic if you have not received any communication, you will receive a response.

As the SRC we are committed to trying to raise funds for this committee through requesting assistance from various donors.

Temporary access to SunLearn

Everyone that has filled in the form has been captured and the list was sent to the relevant stakeholders at Admin A. The SRC only facilitated the collecting of data.

We share the same frustrations with our students with regards to the delays and we will continue applying the necessary urgency on this matter as we are aware classes have started and our students are falling behind.

Nsfas 45k capped accommodation allowance.

Following the peaceful protest held by the SRC on the 10th of February 2023, and an engagement was held between the SRC and the NSFAS. After the aforementioned protest, NSFAS Chief Operations Officer (COO), Nthuseng Mphahlele agreed to urgently meet with Stellenbosch University (SU) Management, SU SRC, and other stakeholders such as the key private accommodation providers in Stellenbosch.

These urgent engagements took place on Monday the 13th of February 2023 at Stellenbosch University at the SU SRC Offices. The NSFAS delegation was led by Mphahlele, followed by the SM Operations Manager, Thillivhali Mukondeli, and the Manager of the CEO's Office, Sivuyile Tshiwula.

The following matters were raised by the SRC:

1. NSFAS Students being stranded due to the NSFAS Cap on Accommodation Allowances.
2. Slow outcomes on funding applications.
3. Food insecurity specifically in relation to NSFAS students in SU Residences due to the cut on food allowances. [Context: NSFAS Students can now only use R16 500,00 to eat in Residences, and the minimum amount to get through the year for at least three meals per day amounts to R22 342,00 – leaving a shortfall of R5 842,00.]
4. The delay in NSFAS providing a funding list to the University.

The outcomes of the meeting were as follows:

1. The NSFAS COO and her delegation confirmed that they understand the urgency of the situation and that they share the pain of the students affected by the NSFAS Cap on Accommodation Allowances.
2. The NSFAS COO and her delegation made an agreement with the SRC to give us feedback by latest 15 February 2023.
3. The SRC also made NSFAS aware that some first-year students are still awaiting the outcome of their NSFAS application. The NSFAS COO then requested that the SRC submit a list to them containing the details of the affected students. The SRC is currently still compiling the data and will be sending it to NSFAS before end of this week. NSFAS will use this data to fast-track their applications.
4. NSFAS will look at the issue of providing funding lists to the University.

Hours following the meeting with NSFAS:

1. The SRC then, via email (with SU Management cc'd), sent a list to NSFAS with the number of students facing the current accommodation crisis because of this cap. In this same email the SRC reiterated their concerns on the affects that this cap has on the mental wellness of students, transformation, access to Higher Education, amongst other factors.

After the visit of NSFAS COO on Monday 13 February, and the urgent email sent by the SRC just hours after their visit, the SRC is happy to confirm to following outcomes thus far:

1. The NSFAS COO replied to the SRC's email on 15 February 2023, as agreed upon between NSFAS and the SRC.
2. NSFAS has asked the SU Management to submit a full breakdown of costs per bed. The same information was subsequently also requested from the key private stakeholders in Stellenbosch.
3. Prof Stan Du Plessis, COO of Stellenbosch University, then immediately responded to their request and provided NSFAS with the requested information.
4. NSFAS has also indicated that a team of NSFAS Officials will come and do oversight at the University and Private Accommodation Spaces on 16 February 2023 to urgently benchmark the accommodation spaces.

The NSFAS Officials will be making a report available, after the benchmarking process is completed, to the NSFAS Management in order to decide the best way forward with the NSFAS Cap on Accommodation Allowances.

END

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