



19 September 2016

Universities South Africa's Response to the Tuition Fees Announcement by Minister of Higher Education & Training, Dr BE Nzimande

Universities SA (USAf) notes and welcomes the Minister's advice to the universities regarding university tuition fee adjustment for the 2017 academic year. Each Council will consider the advice and act upon it.

Responding to the Minister's announcement on behalf of the 26 public universities affiliated to USAf this morning, Chief Executive Officer, Prof Ahmed Bawa, said that considering several national processes underway to determine a more permanent and affordable solution to the fees issue, Universities SA is satisfied with this advice of the Minister for four important reasons.

"First, as required by the Constitution of South Africa, this interim measure facilitates in a small way the progressive access to higher education for all while a more permanent solution is found. That provision in the Constitution must be seen as the guiding light as we head into the future.

"Second, extended state subsidies to the universities ensure that for those students who are at highest financial risk, there is effectively a 0% increase in their tuition fees for 2017. We applaud this step.

"Third, the continuing growth in state spending on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme will help enormously to address the needs of the poorest students. All South Africans would agree that if a student is admitted to a university to study towards a qualification in higher education, there should not be any exclusion based on their financial condition.

"Fourth, USAf is pleased that there is recognition of the fact that the Higher Education Price Index is some 1.7% higher than CPI. Had the suggested increase in tuition fees been based at the 6% level, this would have imperilled the financial sustainability of at least 16 universities in 2017."

Professor Bawa went on to say that USAf's major concern now is to safeguard South Africa's academic project for the 2016 and 2017 academic years, and beyond. "This is a challenge for the entire sector and society more generally. We call on student leaders, academic and support staff, vice-chancellors and university executives and university Chairs of Council to work together to ensure that the academic year is not jeopardised."

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