



higher education & training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Frequently Asked Questions: Changes to DHET funding for poor and working class students in public higher education institutions.

The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) address the changes to student funding resulting from the announcement by the President of South Africa, on 16 December 2017, that government would be phasing in “fully subsidised free higher education and training for poor and working class South Africans” over a five year period.

This announcement has resulted in the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) Bursary Scheme for poor and working class students to access studies at a public university.

The new DHET Bursary Scheme is one component of government’s response to sustained engagement within the higher education sector on the costs of higher and post-school education and training in South Africa, and is part of government’s response to the recommendations of the Heher Commission.

The President’s announcement has implications for the funding of both continuing NSFAS qualifying university students and new first time entrants (FTEN) in 2018. These implications are explained below in sections A and B respectively. Section C deals with the 8% DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant.

A: What does the President’s statement mean for continuing university students?

1. Will I receive a loan or a bursary in 2018 as a returning NSFAS qualifying student?

In line with the President’s statement, if you are a continuing student in 2018 and were funded by NSFAS in 2017 or earlier, your 2018 NSFAS allocation will now be awarded as a bursary. This NSFAS allocation will not have to be repaid.

2. I am a continuing student at a university and owe NSFAS the loan amount for the 2016 and 2017 academic years. Does the announcement of the President mean that my NSFAS debt will be converted to a bursary?

You will be supported to register and continue your studies from 2018 onwards through bursary funding. Your past loans will not be converted to a bursary at this time.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training after undertaking due diligence and affordability studies in conjunction with the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and the National Treasury to determine the quantum of funding required to address the debt owed by students to NSFAS and institutions.

If you are a second year student studying towards a three-year qualification in 2018, funding for your second and third year will be in the form of a bursary and will not have to be repaid.

3. As a NSFAS qualifying returning student, do I have to pay a registration/upfront fee to the university?

You do not need to pay a registration/upfront fee. An arrangement has been made with universities to allow you to register. Your registration/upfront fee will be covered by your NSFAS package.

4. I am a continuing student at a university and have applied to NSFAS for the first time in 2018. Will I be considered for financial aid for the 2018 academic year even though I am not a first time entrant?

Yes, you will be considered for financial aid funding, provided you meet the pre-2018 NSFAS's academic and financial eligibility requirements.

As a continuing student your combined household income threshold will be assessed in terms of the 2017 NSFAS DHET general fund criteria (i.e. up to R122 000 per annum).

5. I am a continuing student at a university and was not funded in prior years, as I did not qualify for NSFAS due to financial ineligibility. For 2018, my combined gross family income is between R122 000 and R350 000 per annum. Does this mean that I am now eligible for NSFAS?

Continuing students who applied for NSFAS by the closing date of the 30 November 2017 will be considered for funding. The criteria that will be applied for returning students' eligibility for funding will be in terms of the pre 2018 DHET General Fund criteria (i.e. utilising the gross household income threshold of R122 000 per annum).

The reason for applying these criteria is that the new DHET Bursary Scheme is being phased in over a period of five years, starting with 2018 FTEN students.

- 6. I was funded by NSFAS in the past, but dropped out in 2016 due to not meeting the academic requirements. I returned to the university in 2017 and paid my own fees through financial assistance from other sources. I meet the academic requirements to continue in 2018. Will I be funded by NSFAS?**

Yes, your NSFAS funding will be reinstated based on meeting the academic requirements. This is in line with NSFAS rules. Your funding in 2018 will be a bursary and not a loan.

- 7. I come from a family with a gross annual household income below R122 000. I was registered in a previous academic year at a university and dropped out due to financial constraints. Will I qualify for funding to return to university to complete my qualification?**

Yes, you will qualify to be funded, provided you meet the NSFAS academic progression criteria, have applied to NSFAS for funding before 30 November 2017, and come from a family with a gross annual income of up to R122 000.

- 8. I graduated in 2016 and have NSFAS debt. Will my NSFAS debt be written off or converted into a grant?**

Your situation will be dealt with as part of the process described in question 2.

- 9. I am a continuing NSFAS qualifying student in 2018 and have university debt. Can I apply to NSFAS for a grant to settle my university debt?**

Your university debt will be dealt with as part of the process described in question 2.

- 10. I am a continuing NSFAS qualifying student in 2018 with university debt. Will I be allowed to register?**

Yes, you can register provided that you have made appropriate arrangements with your university. You will not be required to pay a registration fee/upfront payment in 2018 in order to register. NSFAS will pay this on your behalf.

Your university debt will be dealt with as part of the process described in question 2.

B: What does the President's statement mean for first time entry (FTEN) students in 2018?

11. What is the new DHET Bursary Scheme?

On 16 December 2017, the President announced that government would be introducing “fully subsidised free higher education and training for poor and working class South Africans” and that this would be provided through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to first year students in 2018.

In order to give effect to the President's announcement, the current DHET General Fund for poor South African students to access university education administered by NSFAS, has been strengthened, extended and converted into a bursary scheme for poor and working class South Africans. The DHET Bursary Scheme will be phased in over a period of five years starting in 2018.

12. How will the DHET Bursary Scheme be phased in?

The President announced that “government will now introduce fully subsidised free higher education and training for poor and working class South African undergraduate students, starting in 2018 with students in their first year of study at our public universities”.

What this means is that in 2018 the DHET Bursary Scheme will **only** be introduced for new first time entry students (FTEN) into undergraduate studies at public higher education institutions.

Over the five-year period from 2018 through to 2022, the scheme will be phased in to cover all years of study in undergraduate degrees.

In 2018, the FTEN students will benefit fully from the new scheme. Each year going forward, the next group of FTEN students will benefit from the scheme. Within five years, students in all years of undergraduate study in all programmes will benefit from the scheme.

13. What is a first time entrant (FTEN) into the university system?

An FTEN is a person who has never been registered at any university in the system before, and is entering the university at an undergraduate level for the first time and for their first undergraduate qualification.

This person may have studied at a TVET college and been supported for that qualification before.

There is no age restriction on being an FTEN student. Anyone with the required academic background who is admitted to study in a public higher education institution and meets the criteria for financial assistance will receive funding.

Note that a firm offer of a place to study, which requires an application to a public university, is a critical prior condition for qualifying for funding. Only students with firm offers can be considered for bursaries.

14. Who will be eligible for funding through the Bursary Scheme?

From 2018 onwards, prospective **South African** FTEN university students who have **received a firm offer of a space at, or confirmation of admission into, a public higher education institution** and who meet the **criteria for financial assistance as coming from a “poor and working class” family**, will be eligible for funding.

Prospective students must be South African citizens to be eligible.

Prospective students must have received a **firm offer** from a public higher education institution, and must accept that offer to register for a first tertiary qualification, in order to qualify for funding.

“Poor and working class” means that the prospective student comes from a family with a gross household income of up to R350 000 per annum.

The “household income” is calculated only in terms of the direct family income (i.e. parents, legal guardians or spouse) of the prospective student. It does not include the income of extended family members (e.g. brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles, grandparents), if these are not their legal guardians.

The relevant family members (i.e. parents, legal guardians or spouse) of any prospective student who applies for the DHET bursary funding will be required to give consent for NSFAS to undertake a **means test** to verify that the prospective student qualifies for funding, before the award can be made.

15. What will be covered by the bursary?

All eligible students will be provided with a **bursary that covers the actual cost of their tuition**, plus a NSFAS determined allowance for **prescribed learning materials**.

The **actual cost of tuition** means the tuition fee for the specific programme that the student is registered for at an institution; these tuition fees differ depending on the field of study (e.g. engineering, medicine, art, history, etc.) and the institution attended.

Prescribed learning materials includes the learning materials required for the actual courses taken – for example, a fine art student may require paint/brushes/canvasses; a graphics design student may require a laptop with a specific software package; a pure mathematics student will require a

textbook, etc. Institutions will work with NSFAS to define the packages for different fields of study. The amount provided per student will be capped. It is expected that the prescribed materials will be the minimum needed by the student to enable their success; students will access additional and desired learning support material through university libraries and additional resources available to registered students, such as online open-learning materials.

16. What is meant by ‘subsidised accommodation and travel and/or subsistence’?

DHET bursary students **may** be eligible for subsidised accommodation and living costs including meals.

If a student is eligible, this will be awarded as part of the bursary.

Subsidised accommodation and subsistence refers to the following: government provides the cost of accommodation, meals and basic living requirements **capped** at a specific amount for those who require it based on the policy implemented at an institutional level.

Accommodation will be capped at defined institutional accommodation rates. Where meals are not included in the cost of accommodation, a separate standard allowance (determined by NSFAS) will be made available to cover food and basic necessities required to support the students’ studies. Accommodation will be provided in terms of the university housing policy.

17. Who will qualify to receive funding to cover subsidised accommodation and subsistence and/or transport?

Universities are best placed to make a determination on the applications for travel, subsistence and accommodation allowances. Eligible students who have obtained accommodation in university managed student accommodation (including operational leases for student accommodation between the university and a service provider) will automatically qualify.

Qualifying students who have been identified as eligible for student housing in terms of the university’s student housing policy, but due to limited residence space cannot be accommodated in university managed accommodation, may be eligible for an allowance for suitable off-campus private accommodation after official confirmation from the university that the student qualifies. NSFAS may require confirmation from the university that the accommodation is suitable for student use.

A set of criteria will be applied at each institution to identify which of these students will qualify to receive subsidised accommodation and food and/or transport.

In general, qualifying students whose home address is within a radius of 30 kilometres from the university campus would not be considered for an award for an accommodation allowance. These students may be considered for an award for travel and/or subsistence allowances. However, it is recognised that some students whose home address is within this radius may require accommodation where living conditions are not conducive to support effective study. Universities will identify these students for support in terms of their housing policies.

18. What are the conditions attached to accepting a bursary?

If a prospective student qualifies for a bursary, they will have to sign a contract with binding conditions.

Accepting DHET bursary funding will not require a beneficiary to pay back the funds in monetary terms. However, it does require that the beneficiary meets and maintains certain academic conditions/criteria, as well as service requirements for the duration of the study period, as well as a commitment to the country over the longer term.

Any graduate funded through the DHET Bursary scheme who wishes to emigrate to live in another country will be required to pay back the funds before they leave the country.

Some of the conditions are:

- In the **first year of study**, it is the responsibility of the student to focus on their studies and to acclimatise themselves to university life in a responsible and disciplined manner;
- In **the first year of study and every year thereafter**, the student must comply with the following **academic requirements**:
 - Attend and participate in lectures, tutorials and academic support programmes as required by the institution;
 - Complete all set assignments and/or tasks as required in terms of the due performance requirements of the Institution;
 - Undergo all tests and examinations (written and oral) as required in terms of the due performance requirements of the institution;
 - Obtain satisfactory results for the above-mentioned assignments, tasks, tests and examinations; and

- Meet the progression requirements of the institutions, as well as passing at least 50% of all courses in the first year of study, and passing sufficient courses in subsequent years to enable them to complete their studies in the **minimum number of years plus one year** (n + 1 years of study) [i.e. maximum of two years of study for a one year higher certificate; three years of study for a two year diploma; four years of study for a three year degree or diploma; five years of study for a four year degree; seven years of study for a six year degree].
- In their **second year of studies and all subsequent years until completion**, students will, in addition to their academic studies, comply with the following service requirement:
 - Participate in a minimum of 10 days (80 hours) of community service or special project work, of the student's own choosing from a wide range of possibilities, the purpose of which is to inculcate a culture of giving back and working towards the betterment of our country.
 - The service could include, but is not limited to, volunteering to participate in an environmental clean-up project; volunteering to assist at an ECD centre by reading stories/playing games with young children; assisting early grade teachers by listening to young children read; volunteering to visit an old age home and spending time conversing with older citizens or any other tasks required; volunteering at a hospital or clinic to assist the nursing staff with whatever tasks required as an extra pair of hands; volunteering in a library to assist with any tasks required; volunteering to participate in a community watch programme to ensure the safety of citizens, etc. This service will be offered free of charge.
 - The student may undertake this work at any time during the year, in their vacation time, over weekends, or during the term time in afternoons or mornings where they do not have classes or tutorials to attend.
 - The student must submit a report confirming participation, signed by the manager of the programme supported, once a year.
 - Confirmation of participation is a **requirement for continued funding** in the following year.
- In addition to the above, the student, once they have completed their studies and graduated, must undertake to remain in the country and participate in the economy in whichever way is most opportune for them, for at least the number of years they have been funded. Students who wish to undertake further studies in another country may be permitted to do so, as long as they commit to returning to South Africa and work for at least the length of time they were

funded. Any graduate funded through the scheme who wishes to emigrate within this time frame will be required to pay back the funds before they leave the country.

19. How will NSFAS determine the eligibility of 2018 first time entrant applicants in terms of the revised student funding policy as announced by the President?

NSFAS will apply a **means test** to determine the financial need of a student. The means test takes into account the combined direct gross household income of up to R350 000 per annum. The means test will be undertaken through the consent of the applicant and his/her parents/legal guardians/spouse for NSFAS to verify the household income.

20. Will prospective students from families supported by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), or who attended from Quintile 1, 2 or 3 schools, have to undertake a means test?

Prospective students from families who are recipients of child support grants or disability grants administered through SASSA will automatically qualify for funding and will not have to undergo a means test.

All other students, no matter which school they attended, will be assessed using the NSFAS means test to verify that the applicant is eligible for the DHET bursary.

21. I am a first time entrant and come from a family that earns a gross household income of up to R350 000 per annum. I have been offered a bursary/ scholarship from another funder but it does not cover my full cost of study. Can I receive funding in 2018 from NSFAS to cover the remainder of my full cost of study?

Yes you may be eligible for top up funding, if you meet the academic and financial eligibility requirements.

Government and NSFAS encourages the private sector and other funders, including foundations, other national and provincial departments, etc. to continue to provide bursaries and scholarship to students studying in the university system.

First time entry students in 2018 who come from households with incomes of up to R350 000, who have been awarded bursaries or scholarships from other funders, will not qualify for full NSFAS bursaries. However, NSFAS will consider financial aid to these students on a 'top-up' basis if they are not fully funded through their bursary or scholarship. NSFAS will work with universities to ensure that these students are effectively funded and that there is no "double dipping".

22. I am a first time entrant but did not apply to NSFAS as I thought I would not qualify. I have been offered a space to study at a university. Will NSFAS reopen their applications?

NSFAS will not be reopening applications. However, NSFAS and universities have put a process in place to ensure that students with firm offers from universities identify themselves to the university as a student from a family earning a joint gross household income of up to R350 000 per annum.

You need to go to the financial aid office at your institution and identify yourself.

Each student will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis between universities and NSFAS.

You will be required to submit all relevant supporting documentation as per the NSFAS's criteria. If found eligible, you will be funded.

C: Fee adjustment Grants for the 2018 academic year.

23. What is the 'DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant'?

As in 2017, government will pay a fee increase capped at 8% for all qualifying registered students with a gross combined family income up to R600 000 per annum in 2018.

This is a grant, which covers the increases for tuition fees and university managed accommodation (where applicable), and will not have to be repaid by qualifying students.

To qualify for the grant, university students must apply for the DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant through a form obtainable from their institutions.

24. If I am a continuing student and applied and qualified for the DHET Fee Adjustment Grant in 2017, am I required to reapply for the DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant?

No, you are not required to reapply. Your institution has your information and you will automatically qualify for the 2018 grant.

25. If I am a continuing student with a gross family income of up to R600 000 and did not apply for the DHET Fee Adjustment grant in 2017. Will I qualify for the DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant?

Yes, you will qualify **if you apply** and your combined gross household income is up to R600 000 per annum.

26. In 2018, I am a FTEN student and qualify for the DHET Bursary through NSFAS. Do I have to apply for the DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant?

You will automatically qualify, as the university will have your information on record. You do not have to apply.

27. In 2018, I am a student who went to a Quintile 1, 2 or 3 school. Do I have to apply for the DHET 2018 Fee Adjustment Grant?

You do not have to apply. You will automatically qualify.