

# Free higher education to be phased in over five years

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President Jacob Zuma's announcement of free higher education and training for poor and working class students will be phased in over five years to ensure the sustainability of government's financial resources, Higher Education and Training Minister Hlengiwe Mkhize said on Thursday, 4 January.



Image source: [www.pixabay.com](http://www.pixabay.com)

Mkhize announced that the threshold to qualify for assistance from the National Student Fund Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been raised to students from households with a combined annual income of up to R350,000 per year. The previous threshold was R122,000. Provision has also been made for subsidised accommodation and transport.

In addition, provision has been made for the NSFAS loans of qualifying students in second and third years to be converted to bursaries.

NSFAS financial assistance will also no longer be in the form of loans but bursaries. This would be accommodated within the existing budget parameters of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba has been involved in discussions by the interministerial task team, Mkhize said.

The condition for financial assistance would be for the prospective students to meet the academic criteria and requirements

of the TVET colleges or universities they have applied for. Qualifying students also need to have been offered a place to study and there must be sufficient spaces at each institution to accommodate them.

The plan provides for full bursaries for tuition and study materials to qualifying poor and working-class students at public TVET colleges and universities. Subsidised accommodation or transport would be capped at specific levels for those who qualified. This will start with first-time entry students in 2018 and will be phased in over a period of five years.

NSFAS packages already allocated to returning existing university students in 2018 will be converted from loans to bursaries provided they meet the requirements for academic progression.

Mkhize said NSFAS had already received more than 300,000 applications for first-year students for the 2018 academic year at universities and TVET colleges.

Students who had not applied at an institution or NSFAS and were looking for a space at a higher education institution would be assisted through the central applications clearing house. This is a government online application portal.

"Students who are in possession of firm offers from universities or TVET colleges but did not apply to NSFAS for funding, [and] who qualify for funding according to the revised criteria, will be assisted."

The minister discouraged walk-in applications at institutions.

*Source: BDpro*

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