

Universities called to verify student information to access laptops

Higher Education and Training Minister, Blade Nzimande, has called on universities to contact the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to ensure they verify their student information so that NSFAS-funded students can receive laptops.



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Addressing the media on the department's plans for post school education and training (PSET) institutions on Wednesday - following the country's move to Adjusted Alert Level 4 lockdown - Nzimande announced that NSFAS has to date ordered 170,000 laptops from an appointed service provider, with 90,060 having arrived in the country and ready for distribution.

He said the balance of the laptops will be arriving in the country in mid-July and mid-September 2021.

However, to date the verifying of university student information as per the NSFAS portal has been slow.

"A total of 1,846 students' information has been shared with the provider of which 1,123 has been delivered to four

universities namely, the University of Pretoria, University of Free State (UFS), Durban University of Technology (DUT), and the University of Mpumalanga (UM).

“I call upon our universities to contact NSFAS through the NSFAS portal to ensure that they verify their students’ information. It is important that universities prioritise this task urgently,” Nzimande said.

Technical Vocational Education and Training (Tvet) college students do not order via the NSFAS portal, however, NSFAS will prioritise the Tvet students for delivery.

“A total Tvet listing of 46,846 has recently been shared with the provider for delivery. The provider will contact these students to arrange for delivery as campuses are currently closed. Of the 46,846, a total of 183 has been delivered to South Cape Tvet College and 86 for Central Johannesburg Tvet,” Nzimande said.

Exclusive online learning for all students

On measures applicable to the PSET sector during the current national lockdown restrictions, Nzimande said that in terms of the Adjusted Alert Level 4 lockdown that has now been put in place, the universities do not officially close, but all face-to-face teaching and examinations must halt for the next two-week period.

“Learning will shift exclusively to online learning for all students. Residences will remain open, as it is also not safe for students to travel back home at this time, and it is necessary for students to retain access to campus and residence-based Wi-Fi.

“However, universities need to continue to manage residences according to the necessary health and safety protocols, as outlined in the directions and in line with protocols developed by Higher Health,” Nzimande said.

He warned that under no circumstances should any mass social or other activities be permitted in residences or on campuses during this period and institutions are requested to strictly enforce measures.

“It has also been agreed that international and inter-provincial travel will be discouraged, and limited to essential services and needs. There will be controlled access to campuses for essential services and other activities that cannot be suspended at this time.

“As many staff as possible who can do so, should work from home. The sector will continue to be guided by the 29 March 2021 directions and the 27 June COGTA (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs) regulations,” Nzimande said.

The principle outlined in the higher education sector directions is that all universities will manage their own academic activities, in line with the national directions and health protocols, with the support of Higher Health.

The institutions are also expected to ensure their Covid-19 task teams are functional and active during this period to manage institutional responses to the pandemic, and maintain effective communication and consultation with staff and students.

The new directions provide guidance on matters, including institutional plans; campus health and safety; student accommodation and residences; psychosocial assistance for staff and students; academic classes and examinations; graduations ceremonies and events; international students; and international travel and vaccination.