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SAASSAP Statement on the NSFAS Service Providers' Distribution of Student Allowances at South African Higher Education Institutions

The South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP) has been following the debates, challenges and concerns pertaining to the NSFAS policy changes, in various areas that affect our students. Specifically, SAASSAP has further noted the implementation of the NSFAS direct payments process as part of these policy changes, which has been initiated within the PSET sector starting from July 2023.

As a professional collective of student support professionals, SAASSAP has been at the coalface, directly interacting with the challenges that students are experiencing and have vividly expressed with regards to the onboarding and implementation of the new system.

The issues expressed by students have ranged, among others, from:

1. The delayed payment of allowances to students.
2. The non-availability of direct support from appointed service providers through provided contact details.
3. Inadequate and at times non-user-friendly onboarding processes that lead to students' inability to use provided platforms correctly.
4. The charging of exorbitant fees on student accounts which has the potential result of eroding the full benefits that students are able to derive from their allowances,

These issues arise in the midst of ongoing challenges to finalise previous issues with respect to the close out processes; and they are further compounded by the defunding of students and delays in appeal responses by NSFAS.

We wish to register our support for students to continue their participation in the ongoing onboarding processes because of our understanding that student well-being and success rely heavily on students receiving these allowances on time. It is for that reason that we would like to see the avoidance of the untenable situation where students who rely on allowances to meet their most basic human

needs find themselves without the ability to access these benefits due to non-registration with the appointed service providers in their respective campuses.

We however note that greater collaborative efforts are required to address the legitimate concerns raised by students and their impact on the stability of institutions as well as the continued provision of quality and uninterrupted teaching and learning.

We are of the firm view that the annual disruption of institutions will continue to be a reality in higher education institutions in South Africa unless we collaboratively and collectively develop sustainable solutions that address the deleterious impact of:

1. Poor administration in the handling and processing of applications, student registration data, appeals processes and delayed payments.
2. The lack of administrative and support capacity at NSFAS to handle and manage set processes.
3. The handling of communication by NSFAS and the lack of clear channels of communication whenever institutions seek to efficiently address and resolve queries.
4. The effect and impact of an inefficient system on student mental health, well-being, students' academic performance, and the overall throughput rates.

It is for the foregoing reasons highlighted in this missive that, as SAASSAP, we make the following clarion call which we hope will assist in taking us closer to foregrounding the development of sustainable solutions to student funding or NSFAS-related issues:

1. The urgent need for policy certainty and real student centric practices through minimising the adoption and implementation of policy and practices that deepen instability and fissures at sectoral and institutional levels.
2. The critical and urgent need for the development of a governance model for NSFAS that amplifies the voices of role players in the NSFAS programme. This includes a properly developed stakeholder framework that involves NSFAS, the Department of Higher Education and Training, higher education institutions, and the Service Providers concerned.
3. The establishment of permanent offices on campuses for appointed service providers to deal with and service students directly and provide real time and efficient support for students' queries.
4. The review and re-engineering of NSFAS administrative processes to resolve administrative bottle necks and recurring issues from application to awards and appeals.

5. In order to secure stability in the sector, whenever major policy changes and procedures are considered by NSFAS, genuine stakeholder engagement should take place and the inputs of all critical stakeholders should be taken into consideration.

We hope that the issues raised, together with the solid recommendations highlighted above will go a long way towards ensuring a more efficient and sustainable system aimed towards student access and success.

As SAASSAP, we remain fully committed to work, collaborate and partner with all stakeholders who share our vision of a student-centered approach aimed toward holistic student development and support.

Signed,



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