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UNIVERSITIES SA APPEAL TO THE CORPORATE SECTOR AND PRIVATE DONORS TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS THROUGH BURSARIES AND SCHOLARSHIPS.

There is a growing concern across the university sector that companies and individual donors who traditionally offered students and universities funding for bursaries are no longer doing so. It is believed that this change has come into being on the basis of the rollout of what is commonly spoken about as free higher education. This is deeply worrying and may potentially wound the futures of many students who have found their way into one of our 26 public universities and who do not qualify for the new student funding system.

We should all be clear that the changes that have occurred in student funding have by no means resulted in a free higher education system. It continues to be a fee-based system. What is new is the introduction of the new DHET Bursaries which are aimed specifically at those students who are admitted to our universities and whose gross family income is below R350 000 per annum. For these students there is no doubt that these full cost-of-study bursaries are a wonderful opportunity. Universities SA (USAF) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) meet regularly with the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to try to ensure that the rollout of the new DHET Bursary system is completed successfully this year. And we hope that as we head into 2019, a new highly efficient student financial aid ecosystem will be in place.

It has to be understood, however, that for more than 90% of the students in the university system, this new DHET Bursary does not apply. For these, there continues to be an important need for corporate and private sponsorship of bursaries and scholarships. Who are the students who fall outside of the remit of the new bursaries?

- a. Any new first-time entry student whose family has a gross income of 1 cent more than R350 000 would not qualify for the DHET bursary. And the majority of these students are likely to have siblings which makes affordability of higher education to those families extremely difficult. It is estimated that 60-65% of new entrants DO NOT qualify for these new DHET bursaries.
- b. In 2018, the only returning students that qualify for the old NSFAS financial aid packages are those whose gross family income is less than R122 000. This is a very large group of students and many of them would have proved their ability to successfully complete their study programmes. The NSFAS loans received by these students are not full cost-of-study and so these students are in desperate need of additional support.
- c. Those returning students with gross family incomes of more than R122 000 DO NOT qualify for any NSFAS financial aid package.
- d. The new funding system DOES NOT address the funding needs of any postgraduate student, whether at the level of the Honours, Bachelor of Technology, Masters, Doctoral levels or at the Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma levels.

It should be clear from this that there is still an extraordinarily important role for the private sector to continue to support students with bursaries and scholarships.

This communication is therefore an appeal to the corporate sector and private donors to continue to support students through bursaries and scholarships. There is ample evidence that there is a direct correlation between the performance of students and the extent to which their studies are suitably supported financially. It would be disastrous to find that thousands of students lose support at a time when this very generous new DHET Bursary system is rolled out for others.

Universities SA is a representative association and the voice of all 26 public universities of South Africa.

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