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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1498**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 21/05/2021**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 14 OF 2021**

**Mr M N Nxumalo (IFP) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

Given the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to university students, and considering the negative impact of the disruption of physical classes by the lockdown since 2020, what (a) is the Government’s position regarding the application of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) time limit rule, known as the N+2 rule, on rural students whose learning was disrupted due to poor network coverage and difficult family circumstances and (b) total number of students who were supposed to finish studies in 2020 were affected by the NSFAS time-limit rule and whose funding was, as a result, discontinued in 2021 after having exceeded the prescribed number of years at university? **NW1705E**

**REPLY:**

(a)  It should be noted that universities have generally reported high levels of student participation in teaching and learning, with no university reporting percentages higher than 10% for students not engaged and 4 universities reporting higher than 5% for students not engaged. Universities' teaching and learning plans included the following:

* Development and delivery of online teaching and learning materials: synchronous and asynchronous methods were utilised;
* Development of print-based teaching and learning materials, and delivery to students;
* Uploading of teaching and learning materials to USBs and delivery to students;
* Development and delivery of alternative assessment strategies; and
* Catch-up programmes as students returned to campus.  
  There are many students who lost funding because they exceeded the N+2 rule for various reasons. During the 2020 funding cycle, the Minister approved a concession in the application of the N+2 rule for 2020. This concession was applied as follows:
* Where students cancelled their enrolment in the first semester, the particular year will not add to the N+ calculation.
* Where students provided medical or psycho-social evidence that they had to cancel their studies, that year will not be counted.
* Students in their final year that exceeded the N+2 provisions would be funded to teach them out of the system in that year.  
  (b) **22** 832 NSFAS funded continuing students in 2021 exceeded the N+ rule and were unfunded.