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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2084**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 03/09/2021**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 21 OF 2021**

**Mr S L Ngcobo (IFP) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

(1) Whether, given that in 2021 the National Research Foundation (NRF) introduced new funding criteria and processes for the funding of master’s students and doctoral candidates for part and full cost of study, and in view of the fact that the specified processes have made it difficult for such students and candidates to receive their funding on time and thus frustrating higher learning and research, his department has adopted any urgent processes to ensure that the NRF pays out the funds for the master’s students and doctoral candidates within 2021 before some of them finish their studies; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(2) whether his department is taking any steps to ensure that the NRF criteria and processes of paying out funds due to eligible master’s students and doctoral candidates in 2022 is improved, so that they receive the funding on time; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details? **NW2364E**

**REPLY:**

1. In December 2020, the NRF communicated the funding outcomes for new successful masters and doctoral student applications for the 2021 academic year, including the extension support for masters and doctoral studies who would have completed in 2020 but were impacted negatively by the Covid-19 lockdowns. In March 2021, additional awards for extension support were made following the DSI approval of R9,08 million of reprioritised funds to award additional masters and doctoral extension support funding for the 2021 academic year. The deadline date for the submission of honours applications was extended to March 2021 to accommodate universities whose academic years have been extended due to the Covid-9 lockdown. Between April 2021 and May 2021 all honours awards had been concluded and communicated.

Successful applicants received their provisional award letters for postgraduate funding from the NRF and were required to submit the signed Conditions of Grants (CoGs), together with the proof of registration to the NRF, for the funds to be released to the university. Delays in the release of funding by the NRF were due to delays in the submission of the signed CoGs, and proof of registration. The Department has duly instructed the NRF to maintain constant communication with the universities’ Research Offices to facilitate the submission of outstanding documentation, by the universities to the NRF, to enable the release of outstanding funds within this year and before some of the students finish their studies.

In order to manage cash-flow, the universities have a grant deposit from the NRF which is used to pay out funds to postgraduate students and other grantholders. The grant deposit ensures the availability of funds at the university to honour grant payments and is replenished as the university invoices the NRF on grant expenditure.

1. Between 2017 and 2019 the NRF entered into a phase of preparing for the implementation of the DSI-NRF Postgraduate Funding Policy and held numerous engagements with the university stakeholder community. In 2020 and 2021, the NRF continued to hold virtual engagements with all 26 universities to ensure alignment with the implementation plan of the policy and to address challenges experienced by stakeholders. It must be noted that the start of the implementation of the policy coincided with the start of the COVID-19 related national lockdown and this may have impacted on the readiness of institutions to implement the new Full Cost of Study (FCS) and Partial Cost of Study (PCS) Funding.

The DSI has requested the NRF to engage further with the universities to streamline the payment processes in the 2022 academic year. Towards this goal/end, the NRF has made and authorised the following adjustments in relation to improving the payment processes for the 2021 academic year:

**Accredited private rental accommodation** - The NRF has taken note of the challenges relating to the requirement for universities to accredit all private rental accommodation occupied by postgraduate students and has therefore taken the decision to rescind the requirement for ‘accredited accommodation.’ The NRF is considering the option of setting regional accommodation allowances which could eliminate the need for a valid lease agreement for the private rental accommodation.

**Payment of allowances to students** - In order to be audit compliant, payments for allowances will be made either on a monthly or quarterly basis to students. The quarterly provision is made to accommodate institutions that have not as yet implemented systems and processes for monthly payments of student allowances.

**Payments may be made according to the semester of registration** – The NRF has provided clarity to the universities relating to this matter. If the student registered in the first half of the year (first semester), regardless of the month of registration, and is registered for the full year, the student is eligible for the full year scholarship which must be made available to the student. Likewise, if the student registers in the second half of the year (second semester), only half the scholarship may be made available for the 2021 academic year. The payment rules for each of the allowances still apply.

**Payment of allowance for electronic study device –** The NRF has provided clarity to the institutions relating to this matter. The institution and the NRF will not require quotations or proof of purchase for the electronic study device allowance. The allowance will be made available only once irrespective of whether the student receives NRF funding for a further postgraduate degree(s).