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**Memorandum from the Parliamentary Office**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 343**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 19/02/2016**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 2 OF 2016)**

**Mr D Bergman (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:**

1. How many students who were supported by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Fund since its inception (a) have graduated, (b) are still studying or (c) have dropped out;
2. in respect of students who dropped out, (a) why did the specified students drop out and (b) what is being done to curb this dropout rate;
3. (a) what (i) total amount do the specified students owe to the fund and (ii) percentage of the specified students are earning enough to begin payments back to the fund, (b) how many of the specified students have been blacklisted as a result of their NSFAS debt and (c) what plans are in place in respect of the specified students and their debts?

**NW353E**

**REPLY:**

1. (a) The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has funded 1 700 533 students since its inception.

(b) and (c) NSFAS does not hold a complete data set on dropouts, and is currently augmenting this data from data sources such as the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS). NSFAS, in collaboration with the Department, is currently in the process of conducting a full cohort study looking at cohorts of students from 2005 through to 2014. It is expected that the results from this study will be finalised by the end of June 2016.

Stellenbosch University conducted a cohort study for NSFAS in 2012, which revealed that 34% of the first-time entering student cohort for the 2000 academic year had qualified, 29% were still studying and 37% had dropped out. After a full nine years, 55% of this same cohort had qualified, 6% was still studying and 38% had dropped out.

This study goes on to conclude that NSFAS non-funded students have a slightly higher drop-out and lower qualification rate, with 48% having completed their qualification, 6% still studying and 46% having dropped out. These figures are consistent with figures released annually by the Council on Higher Education, which includes both NSFAS non-funded and funded students.

1. (a) Data shows that students from poor socio-economic backgrounds are disproportionately at risk of failing and dropping out of their studies, i.e. most of these students are NSFAS recipients.

(b) Over the recent years, considerable resources have been provided to address the needs of these students, which amongst others include:

* The establishment and expansion of “First-Year Experience” projects, which take a holistic view of the academic and psychosocial (non-academic) factors that impact on student performance, particularly during the difficult school-to-university first-year transition. All universities now have some version of this programme;
* The effectiveness of the abovementioned strategies are monitored through progress reports submitted by each institution. There has been some improvement in the success rates, however it is still too early to determine the outcome of these programmes;
* Greatly expanding the provision of mentoring and tutorial support, targeting particularly first-year and at risk students;
* The development and strengthening of Writing Centres and other forms of language support, including the development of multilingual online concept glossaries;
* Resources to support the development of e-learning approaches and materials to enhance student learning both in and outside of the classroom;
* Foundation provisioning programmes which support underprepared students though extended curriculum programmes; and
* Improved data analytics at institutional level to identify students at risk and develop interventions to support them.

1. (a) (i) Based on NSFAS loan book data, there are 247 913 students who have dropped out before graduating.

(ii) NSFAS becomes aware of the income status of debtors when they are registered as taxpayers. This information is provided to NSFAS by the South African Revenue Service (SARS) and is used to make contact with non-paying debtors. Of the 247 913 students referred to above, 190 284 (77%) students are registered as taxpayers with SARS.

(b) None of these students have been blacklisted by NSFAS.

(c) NSFAS has a number of measures in place to recover debts from students who have become debtors. The strategy that NSFAS is implementing for debt collection comprises of the following measures:

* Sending statements to debtors;
* Appointment of Collection Agencies;
* Data analysis to identify opportunities to improve collections;
* Ongoing improvements to the outstanding debt recoveries campaign;
* Adversely listing defaulting debtors, i.e. those who are capable of paying and are refusing in terms of Section 21 of the NSFAS Act;
* Ongoing data cleansing of contact details; and
* Establishment of a whistle-blowers facility.

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DIRECTOR – GENERAL

STATUS:

DATE:

REPLY TO QUESTION 343 APPROVED/NOT APPROVED/AMENDED

Dr BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

STATUS:

DATE: