



**10 July 2020**

## **Seventy-seven students receive bursaries relief at public universities, thanks to SASSETA's intervention**

A total of 77 students pursuing degrees in the fields of Law, Psychology and Social Work received much-needed relief when the Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA), cleared off their tuition fees for the 2020 academic year. The bursary funding of R5,4 million was paid directly to the universities at which these students are enrolled. This was after all the necessary administration (selection and vetting) was completed between their institutions and SASSETA.

SASSETA's generosity was a response to a fundraising effort of Universities South Africa (USAf), which has been engaging various entities in pursuit of relief for especially students in the missing-middle category. These are students whose annual family income falls in the R350 001 to R600 000 bracket, which places them above the qualifying threshold of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). Such students' family income, though too high to qualify them for NSFAS, is too low to render them eligible for study loans from commercial banks – hence the term, “missing middle”. As a result, many such students are saddled with historical debt and struggle to complete their university education. In numbers, missing-middle students represent between 200,000 and 250,000, a figure accounting for between 16.6% and 20% of the total current student population (1,2m) at the 26 public universities.

The benefitting students are enrolled at the University of Fort Hare, the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, Walter Sisulu University, the University of Zululand as well as the University of the Western Cape. In addition to being required to be in the missing-middle category, the 77 students were required to be South African citizens of between 18 and 35 years of age. Priority was also given to students in their masters or doctoral studies.

This is the second time that a Sector Education and Training Authority comes to the rescue of missing-middle students. In May 2020, USAf announced an R280 million cash injection from the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), which was pumped into bursaries of at least 7000 students enrolled for undergraduate study across the public university sector.

Prof Ahmed Bawa, Chief Executive Officer at Universities SA, says any bursary granted to a needy student enables a tremendous shift in that student, from preoccupation with day-to-day survival to fully immersing themselves in their studies. That is why USAf continues to negotiate with organisations with a social conscience to join it in partnerships that seek to retain students from poor socio-economic backgrounds in the higher education system, until they successfully complete their studies. Professor Bawa says research has proven that citizens with university education attract higher income, attain a higher standard of living, tend to live longer and, in turn,

contribute more to their countries' economies. "We can therefore not thank SASSETA enough for this much-needed relief."

The USAf CEO added that when the government announced increased investment in NSFAS in 2017, many corporates regrettably retreated from granting bursaries. "With missing-middle students ranging between 200,000 and 250,000 across the university sector, what we have received to date only scratches the surface." He, however, reiterated USAf's gratitude to SASSETA and implored other organisations to follow suit.

SASSETA agreed to partner USAf in this regard in accordance with its mandate to fund the training of employees working in the safety and security sector as well as those aspiring to work in this sector. This is according to Acting CEO, Mr Vukani Memela, and Executive Manager Learning Programmes, Ms Juwayria Amod. In addition, SASSETA is pivotally involved in funding the placement of unemployed graduates in this sector to enable them to gain meaningful work-based training aligned to their qualifications.

SASSETA has also started training unemployed rural youth to enable them to make a meaningful contribution in the safety and security sector. "Of critical importance is the fact that SASSETA's training investment is focussed on issues such as gender-based violence, victim empowerment, crime prevention, paralegal and private security training," says Mr Memela.

USAf's ongoing fundraising is being driven from the Directorate: Operations and Sector support, headed by Dr Linda Meyer, and the Directorate: Finance and Administration, headed by Mr Emert Nkhatu. USAf is a representative association of all 26 public universities, whose aims include supporting South Africa's universities to effectively perform their core functions of teaching and learning; research and community engagement; thus enabling them to contribute to national development.

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