

**Title:****The Impact of the Change in the NSFAS Application Process on Students' Academic Progress and Overall Well-Being****Authors:** Njabulo Maphumulo and Venicia McGhie**Proposal**

The provision of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is to assist previously disadvantaged and poor students to access higher education in order to reach their full potential. The NSFAS application process was changed from a decentralised one to a centralised one in 2016. However, the Department of Higher Education and Training and the NSFAS Agency did not foresee the negative consequences of this change. Staff and students are grappling with challenges such as not receiving feedback on time and having to wait months for an answer, which caused emotional stress and anxiety to students and their families and impacted the students' academic progress negatively.

This paper reports on a study that investigated the change of the NSFAS application process and its effect on the students' academic progress and overall well-being in the learning process at a historically Black university. The study's main objective was to examine the efficacy of the centralised application process to ascertain whether it impacted the students' academic progress positively or negatively.

The main question that the study attempted to answer was: *What were the emerging issues of the centralised NSFAS application process and the impact thereof on undergraduate students, and how could the issues be resolved or prevented?*

Sen's (1980) and Nussbaum's (1988) Capability Approach was used as the theoretical framework because the study was concerned with the students' well-being and academic success. Five capabilities were identified based on the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (1996). These were (i) access to education; (ii) social-

economic status; (iii) health and wellness; (iv) student support and development; and (v) academic progression and quality of life.

The study was situated within a qualitative research paradigm because it provided a lens to understand and analyse the participants' behaviour in their natural contexts and situations. It assisted the researcher to discuss and interpret the data collected in a meaningful and sensitive manner. Accordingly, a case study research design was utilised to collect the data, which was analysed, discussed, and interpreted based on the five capabilities of the theoretical framework.

It was argued that the Capability Approach could be used as a suitable framework to assess an individual's well-being, social organisations, policies, and related social change proposals. Essentially, the NSFAS was introduced to support and enable previously disadvantaged students to access higher education. If such support is provided, it will benefit the students' families, communities, and the broader South African society. Moreover, successful student learning can significantly improve disadvantaged families' capabilities, socio-economic statuses, and the freedom to freely be and function optimally.

**Keywords:** Students, higher education, NSFAS, decentralised, centralised, capabilities, impact, challenges, academic progress, learning experiences, well-being