

Nelson Mandela University students block campus entrance over unpaid NSFAS funds

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Lectures are taking place online.



On Monday, students used a goal post to block the entrance to the south campus of Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha. They were protesting unpaid NSFAS allowances. Photo: Joseph Chirume

Students blocked roads to the south campus of Nelson Mandela University in Gqeberha on Friday and Monday. They demanded to be paid outstanding allowances from the embattled National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

The protest on Monday was led by members of the Central Student Representative Council (CSRC). “Our students are contending with the crisis of NSFAS allowances, being without accommodation, going to class on empty stomachs, and being defunded by NSFAS,” said a CSRC letter to the university.

Students agreed to halt protesting on Tuesday following talks with the university’s management. But the university says most lectures will continue online until further notice.

Student leader Bonginkosi Shongwe said, “If the university doesn’t honour its commitments, we will go back to the streets.”

Shongwe said the CSRC was still not happy that lectures would be conducted online because it would exclude students who could not afford data, particularly NSFAS-funded ones.

“We are not happy because students have not been equipped with resources and tools to attend online. Data has not been disbursed, and applications for laptops for the first years only started yesterday. So poor and working-class students are currently without laptops,” said Shongwe.

In the letter, the student leaders also called for the institution to provide on-campus accommodation to registered students in need. They also want data to be given to students for online learning, and for shuttles to do eight trips instead of the current five trips, among other demands.

In response, the university wrote: “All students with firm offers, who have been unable to register for reasons beyond their immediate control, have been included in all academic activities. However, accommodation remains a bigger challenge as there are simply not enough beds on campus to meet the demand. This is not new, hence the growth in our off-campus student accommodation project with private landlords.”

The university also said that the campus clinic would continue its distribution of 600 food packages, with the addition of 250 meals and a soup kitchens in the week.

The university promised to “expedite the appeals processes” to ensure that “all academically deserving students” are given enough time to register.

On the issue of laptops, the university said that NSFAS has paid the book allowances so it will be giving students the option to use those funds to secure laptops.

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