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SASSETA grants USAf R10m to clear away tuition fees debt of senior students

The Safety and Security Sector Education and Training Authority (SASSETA) has made a grant of R10 million to Universities South Africa (USAf) as a contribution to clearing off student debt that could otherwise prohibit some underprivileged students from graduating in 2021.

The Chief Executive Officer of SASSETA, Mr Thamsanqa Mdontswa, said the R10m will be disbursed through USAf, the representative body of public universities. USAf will, in turn, consult with its member institutions to identify the beneficiaries among academically performing but financially challenged students. Thereafter, USAf will, together with SASSETA, distribute the bursaries to the most deserving of these identified students.

“Depending on the size of the outstanding debt we estimate that we would be able to assist approximately 200 students to graduate and become economically active citizens,” says Mr Mdontswa.

Commenting on this grant, USAf’s CEO, Professor Ahmed Bawa, says students’ struggle with tuition fees is a perennial problem. While assistance would ordinarily have gone a long way, SASSETA’s intervention now could not have been timelier, considering the devastation that CoVID-19 has brought to the economy, people’s livelihoods and families’ disposable income. “Words can therefore not describe our gratitude and appreciation for this generosity and act of compassion,” Professor Bawa says. “Every individual student freed from unnecessary worry is enabled to focus on learning, which is the primary purpose of being at a university. We therefore appeal to similar organisations and corporate entities to come to the aid of our students in these difficult times. Our young people need society’s intervention now, more than ever.”

According to Dr Linda Meyer, Director: Operations and Sector Support at USAf, who is leading USAf’s fundraising drive in support of universities, her department will begin to liaise with Financial Aid Offices at USAf’s member institutions, shortly, to identify the R10m beneficiaries.

In addition to the hard grants disbursed, SASSETA will, starting in 2021, also sponsor up to 50 fresh LLB graduates’ practical vocational training within universities’ Legal Aid centres. SASSETA’s support, a pilot project for 24 months, will be limited to the graduates’ stipends for the duration of the practical vocational training period. The outcomes of this project will enable SASSETA to determine the way forward beyond 2022.

SASSETA and USAf have previously partnered in aid of especially students who lie outside of the NSFAS threshold in annual family income of R350 000. In June, 2020, 77 students pursuing degrees in the fields of Law, Psychology and Social Work received much-needed relief when SASSETA paid up their tuition fees for the 2020 academic year. In 2020 alone, SASSETA awarded USAf R4,9m, R5,4m and R1,9m in grants and bursaries. The R10m just secured brings SASSETA’s total contribution to the plight of university students to R 22,2m in nine months.

Inquiries: ‘Mateboho Green – Manager: Corporate Communication (072 807 4677)