

# SAYAS statement on the current funding crisis in higher education in South Africa



The [South African Young Academy of Science \(SAYAS\)](#) is an organisation of sixty top young academics selected on academic merit representing 23 institutions of higher education and research across the country. SAYAS is the voice of young scientists and aims to contribute to solutions to national challenges facing the academy and society.

We are acutely aware of the crisis in higher education funding in South Africa and the challenges that this presents to students, staff and workers across our campuses. We wish to voice our support to all efforts aimed at improving the ways in which higher education is financed and managed in South Africa. SAYAS members remain committed to on-going fundraising to support students through bursaries, fellowships and research grants. We are aware that this type of funding is insufficient to deal with the current crisis and call on the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), to urgently address the higher education funding crisis in South Africa through increasing funding available to institutes of higher education and to students. The need for increased spending was highlighted in a 2014 Report to the Ministerial Committee for the Review of the Funding of Universities which recommended significant changes to the university funding system, and in particular an increase in the percentage of GDP spent on R&D and education<sup>1</sup>.

Higher education is central to the social and economic development of South Africa<sup>ii</sup> and equitable access to higher learning is critical in the redress of historical injustice and exclusion. As our constitution indicates, everyone has a right to further education (which includes higher education) and the state is required to take reasonable measures progressively to increase its availability and accessibility. As part of this constitutional mandate, we believe it is crucial for there to be sustained research into developing improved funding models which are developed and implemented with urgency. Given South Africa's position as one of the most consistently unequal countries globally in terms of income<sup>iii iv</sup>, the on-going increases in the tuition costs of higher education impact the poorest students and could further drive inequity in terms of education if not equitably applied. SAYAS calls for research into the development of a revised approach to the financing of higher education that will ensure that the poorest students are not excluded. To this end, SAYAS would like to partner with others to pursue research in this area.

Whilst recognising that this is a national crisis, we are aware that the challenges of insufficient funding for higher education are being dealt with differently across university campuses. To this end, the purpose of this statement is to call for engagement at a national level between key stakeholders, including student-led movements, staff, government, and university leadership.

- We call on DHET urgently to address the higher education funding crisis in South Africa through increasing funding available to institutes of higher education and to students.
- We call on DHET and universities to review the ways in which student financial support is awarded, and for research into the development of an improved funding model that better considers the financial need of individual students.
- We call for improvements in the financing of academic staff, administrative staff and workers to address lack of capacity, precarious employment conditions and ensure fair and equitable pay and benefits for all.
- We condemn all forms of violence - both from protesting and non-protesting students, staff, police and private security - and urge all to voice their needs in a non-violent manner that supports peaceful, respectful engagement between university management structures and protesting students.

We recognise a wide diversity of views on the matters we raise above. This is also reflected among members of SAYAS. We respect that and therefore call for urgent and in-depth engagement around these serious matters.

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Cc:  
Dr Bonginkosi Emmanuel "Blade" Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training  
Student Representative Councils (SRCs) across the country  
Academic Unions across the country  
Universities SA  
VCs across the country

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