

FREE EDUCATION SUBMISSION

South African Union of Students



**SUBMISSION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON FEE FREE EDUCATION**

**JUNE 2016**

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### **SOUTH AFRICAN UNION OF STUDENTS SUBMISSIONS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION ON THE FEASIBILITY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF FEE FREE EDUCATION.**

29<sup>TH</sup> June 2016

For the attention of the Chairperson Judge Hehar and the free education commission. Please note that we are still awaiting some feedback and submission from SRC's and other student groupings thus this is a draft.

#### **Introduction**

The South African Union of students (SAUS) is the largest federation of student representation from across the country. It is a structure elected by all Student Representative Councils (SRCs) from all universities in the country. SRCs according to the Higher Education Act are representative of all students in their various institutions. Thus SAUS as a structure is non-partisan and can be said to represent all students in the higher education sector in South Africa. As a student union we are hereby making the following submissions on behalf of the various student stakeholders mentioned above.

#### **Background**

South Africa like many other countries in the world has suffered a violent past of colonialism and apartheid. It is a history that has been plagued by racism and inequality on all levels whether it be economic, political, social or otherwise. It was against this background of oppression that students throughout history formed social movements to challenge the status quo and bring about substantive equality in the context in which they found themselves.

It has been 23 years since the advent of democracy in 1994, however as students we have begun to realize that while we have political freedom it is not complete freedom or liberation. In particular the constitutional promise of economic equality and freedom is yet to be realized. At the centre of such realization is the implementation of free and quality education. With education and skills upliftment we can equip the youth to help realize a life where the playing field has been more equalized.

We must also acknowledge our violent history of colonialism and apartheid, and the impact that this has on access to higher education. The bitter truth is that when the doors of higher learning are blocked, it is as us as the poor, black working class masses of the country that suffers. Hence we cannot seek to transform this country and dismantle the legacy of apartheid without opening up access to higher education.

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In October 2015 student anger boiled over with the creation of the mass student movement of Fees Must Fall. Members of South African Union of Students and SRCs were at the centre of this movement and the protests thereof. We showed the country and indeed the world the power of a mobilized youth to shake the core of an unjust system. Thousands of voices united in the cry for free and quality education.

This call however is not a new one. It is call that was codified in the Freedom Charter in 1955, and since then students have actively attempted to realize free education. Many times this fight was taken to the streets in different forms of mass action. These included protests, pickets, demonstrations, shut downs and free education marches. But the agenda was and always will be the demand for free and quality education.

Last year at the Union buildings members of SAUS were on the ground with our students when we marched to Union buildings to demand free education. We also led the delegation of students and SRCs that met with the President of the country in which the 0% fee increment for 2016 was announced. This was a huge victory for the student movement and a symbolic commitment to the realization of free education. However this moratorium is only for the year 2016, it is not free education. Fees have not fallen, they have merely been frozen temporarily. The fight for free and quality education continues.

We are pleased as the Union that Government and the President of the Republic have established a commission that will investigate the realization and introduction of free education. We welcome that the State has listened and adhered to the call of their youth when we took to the streets. It cannot be business as usual.

This is what has led to the submission of the South African Union of Students and all of our affiliates to the Presidential commission on free education. We believe that any battle cannot be won in a boardroom without being won in the streets. This proposal is a codification of possible models and factors to be taken into account when restructuring the higher education space in order to realize free and quality education. We are optimistic that the outcomes of this commission will favour the interest of our students and working class in the country.

### **The Need For Free And Quality Education**

Certain people in the country do not understand why we are fighting for free education. Others even see us as people who are not realistic who do not like to study therefore we are interested only in protests. The following are amongst the reasons why we want free education to be introduced;

- Poor Background of many of our students whom their families cannot afford to pay for huge exorbitant costs of study. The affordability of higher education in

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South Africa is a real challenge and state funding for higher education has been declining in real terms (1.1% from 2000 to 2012), while the proportion of gross domestic product going to higher education has remained around 0.7%, which is low by international standards.

- Increasing student debts which in our struggle we call it the black debt. Most of our students rely on NSFAS. However if the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, or NSFAS, contribution is included, then the government contribution is well over 1%, but there is still not enough funding even with fees. Universities have been increasing tuition fees to mitigate shortfalls and related vulnerabilities. On the other hand, the NSFAS is unable to provide financial support to all the deserving poor – families with an income below R130, 000 (US\$8,500). Outstanding debt for universities is estimated at around R5 billion (US\$329 million), while for NSFAS it is over R15 billion. Most of our students are forced to drop-out whilst those who remain live with that horrible experience of huge debts that institutions continue to harass them to pay
- Social Justice and transformation is in line with what we seek to achieve when free education is introduced. We are arguing that charging fees is against the spirit of the Freedom Charter of 1955, which was a political aspiration expressed 60 years ago along with other demands such as the ending of apartheid, and health and housing. These political aspirations were not formulated in the context of political, economic and educational realities in South Africa in 2016. We are of the belief that all the people agree with our demand for free education and all the people identify themselves with the freedom charter.
- African Enrolment has been increasing over the years and majority of us as African are on the periphery of economic activities of the country. Our tools of analysis taught us that the economy is the base and determines everything in the superstructure. We are not able to be excited that the doors of learning are open for Africans when we are financially excluded and cannot afford. Black academics will start to be produced to cover the gap.
- Skill needed by the country. SAUS is convinced that the Country is in serious need for skills for economic development. When free education is introduced, many people will flock into the system and gain necessary skills that will help the country.
- Human Resource capital for the private sector will be intensified. We know that amongst the beneficiaries of the output or products of free education is the private sector that will gain the much needed human resource.
- The social support system and its further development will be necessitated by the introduction of free education. Many families are collapsing because of poverty and unemployment. SAUS believes that educated people are having more chances of getting jobs and thereby getting a salary. When free

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education is introduced, our people will access the system, get education and look after their families.

- Reduction of criminal activities through free education. We are convinced that most of the people who commit crime are either drop-outs, uneducated or unemployed. When free education is introduced people will access it easily and thereby get separated away of crime.
- Research output will be expanded because many people will be able to study up to any level without any financial hinderances. Research output goes hand in hand with new inventions and innovations. This will be an advantage for the country going forward.

### The Free Education Model Envisaged by SAUS

There are several models around the question of free and quality education. The biggest point of contention being the recipients of this free education: free education for the poor or free education for all.

Ultimately we as SAUS envision a South Africa where education is free for all and finances are no longer a barrier to entry. This is our long term vision and we acknowledge that the realization of free education is likely to be a phased in model, thus free education for the poor is the first step towards a progressive higher education system. We need to ensure that we particularly empower and advantage the poor in order for us to start alleviating class struggles, especially in the capitalist scheme.

We acknowledge the stark inequality between the rich and poor, between the 'have' and the 'have not.' Education needs to be used as a tool to bridge this gap. However one cannot paint both groups with the same brush, we cannot use the same scale to evaluate these groups. Educating the poor and the working class must be a priority and initial step toward a fully realized model of free education for all. But we must caution the problematic nature in attempting to define the poor as it could be used to further divide the country. For SAUS, the poor includes not just those who are current beneficiaries of NSFAS but it also includes the so called "missing middle."

The missing middle are not middle class students, these are students from the working class who are too rich for NSFAS, and too poor to pay fees: *too poor to be rich, and too rich to be poor*. They are the children of teachers, of police men, of civil servants and others.

The cost of tuition and accommodation fees can easily amount to over R100 000 per annum for a single student and this excludes textbooks, food and other living expenses. "Missing middle" students are from homes with a household income ranging from about R120 000 per annum to approximately R400 000 per annum.

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This is definitely insufficient to cover the cost of today's tertiary education, especially if there are many dependents in the household.

Table one and table two below reflect this average cost of study per student and the salary that civil servants (as an example and microcosm of the missing middle) earn. The cost of study and the cost of living versus the household income is further discussed as variables to determine that the free education that we envisage is free education for the poor.

**Table 1. Current average cost of study per student per year.**

Residence costs	R40 000
Transport costs	R9 000
Tuition fee	R26 000
Book and stationery	R10000
Food	R15 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>R100 000</b>

Table 1 above adapted from SAUS Report 2015

**Table 2: Average salaries of civil servants**

Teachers	R600 000-R280 000
Police Officers	R105000-156000
Nurses	R150 000-350000
Average salary	R180 000

Table 2: above adapted from business Tech report 2016 (all figures are approximate)

The reality is that when analysing the numbers: the cost of tuition and all other related costs, easily accounts for more than 50% of the family income. This excludes other living expenses such as mortgage, electricity, water, monthly expenditure etc. This means that the working class and missing middle cannot afford to pay for the tuition being charged by universities. Some of our students are categorised as follows in terms of background

1. Students with parents but they are earning less as reflected above
2. Students with parents but they are not working due to unemployment.
3. Students who do not have parents at all and do not have any person to pay for them or to provide social support.
4. Students who live with above age guardians (pensioners) surviving on a social grant.
5. Students who do have parents who are rich but these parents neglected them and these parents are not supporting them.

The majority of these students are black Africans. They are deserving students who can change their future when given a chance to study. Many capable students fall

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through the cracks of this problematic system for a variety reasons. Some examples include being financially excluded and being unable to get NSFAS, some drop out because of the social conditions at home, lack of academic support, lack of accommodation or food. It is the system that needs a greater structural change to prevent this from happening.

There must also be emphasis put on the quality element. The call is for free AND quality education. The academic project is integral to this process. The quality of our education need not be compromised in our pursuit to open up access.

We however must note that access to education is but one element of the greater equation. Government and the private sector need to increase economic development and entrepreneurship so as to increase youth employment opportunities. We cannot have a population of citizens who are well educated but can't get jobs to contribute to society.

### Decolonization

Many of the recent student protests and student movements have highlighted the fact that while we are fighting for free education, we are also fighting for a decolonized free and quality education. This decolonization project is about a total overhaul of the current system that is inherently exploitative and exclusionary. The current higher education system is one that is structurally racist. It seeks to exclude the poor, black child on all levels. It is not just financial exclusion, it includes academic, emotional, accommodation, and food security barriers. Ultimately the higher education spaces needs to be restructured such that it is providing student support on all levels to ensure success and increase throughput rates.

This is to ensure that a student who starts first year will come the other side with a degree within the standard time. It is possible but we need to rethink the education system from accessibility to the relevance of the skills learnt in the workforce. Are we training students in African universities for African needs? We need an Africanised university, African solutions to African problems

The current educational crisis is about a greater structural issue. The system was not designed to educate and accommodate the working class masses of this country. The current system is inherently flawed. It was created and designed to educate and equip a small white minority. Management and SRCs deal with one element of the system e.g. they are able to lift the registration fee at the beginning of the year (which is a barrier to entry) and allow poor students to register. But the rest of the system collapses as there are not enough beds to house these students, there are not enough lecturers or seats in the venue, there are not enough textbooks etc. These students are then not given the optimal support required for them to succeed



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and likely fail at the end of year undoing the hard work that was made by the SRCs to open up access.

In order to address the greater structural issues in higher education, we need a structural solution: a public and decolonised education that is free (or at least poses no financial or other barriers).

We have also have to ask ourselves what education is about? It is simply about preparing human beings for individual jobs that will benefit self-interest or is it about building people and building society using education as a tool. We need to be developing active citizens that will develop South Africa and help alleviate the poorest of the poor. Jobs are important but education is not simply opportunity for uplifting families and communities but basic, simple DIGNITY

### De-commodification of education

Unfortunately many of our higher education institutions have allowed education and learning to be commodified, meaning that people get the education that they can AFFORD, not the education that they deserve.

We have reduced education to a marketable service that a student pays for and where the university spends a great deal of energy on ensuring that there is payment. The focus is no longer on the academic project. The focus is not on learning, or on developing but on ensuring that we pay the institution for the service rendered without proper academic support and holistic learning. Evidence of this commodification is the fact that degrees/diplomas are structured such that there are several courses that accumulate certain points and they cost a certain monetary amount e.g. Accounting I is 36 points and costs x. And the focus is on accumulating these points and paying off the course, less the content of what is learnt.

We also acknowledge that universities are not the only institutions in higher education. There are also TVETs, FET colleges and other private colleges. There is seriously problematic nature of these private colleges (e.g. Monash, Varsity College). They are the epitome of the commodification of education. Students at these institutions spend years studying, costing the country and their family money but instead of reaping the benefits at the end of it, they can't get a job and are reduced to low income and unskilled work due to the poor quality of their degree/diploma.

While these private colleges such as Monash, Rosebank College, and Varsity College are filling a gap in the further education space, they are for profit education institutions. These colleges are business slanted. Their vice chancellors/rectors are literally referred to as CEO's. The aim is not to educate but to make a profit on

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students who were either unable to enter the university space or wanted to build a different yet much needed skill. And they lead to major problems and great issues of debt. If we had a functioning public education system there would be no demand for them.

These private colleges symbolize the absolute privatization and commodification of education which is what we risk if we don't change the way we doing things. As SAUS we reject this model of the privatization of education as we envision a free and decommodified education.

### **SAUS Perspective on how free education can be funded and introduced.**

The debate has always been that free education is not possible; others said in a capitalist country free education will remain a dream. These sentiments are nothing but just a discouragement to us in our struggle and access and success. Many counties introduced free education both in Africa and abroad yet some of these countries are even classified as capitalist countries. These countries include Germany (2000s), Norway and Uganda whilst the socialist countries Mozambique and Kenya introduced free education as well between 1963 and 1992. Amongst other ways ,we are putting forward the following as means and ways how the free education that we are demanding can be funded;

- a) Cutting the wage bill. The wage bill according to Africa Check is at R470 billion which is one third of the total government spending. SAUS believe that is the government can cut the wage bill by 7% we can raise about R26 billion rands to add to the call for free education.
- b) The education tax. Introducing the education tax can help to add more funding to education. Tax payers are the biggest contribution to all government collection into the national revenue. An education tax of 3% can raise more than R30 billion from all the tax payers that can contribute to the free education call.
- c) International Solidarity. South Africa is a developing country in the third world and like any other underdeveloped nation will rely on other fully developed countries to finance some of its aspirations. Mozambique for example introduced free education in the 1990s and the international solidarity helped them to fund part of the free education bill. The country will create a model that developed country can be able to release funding and assist in funding free education.
- d) Adjusting government spending. This revolves around government priorities. SAUS believe that some of the government commitments such as for the fights for officials and non-social services needs to be reduced and the balance be taken to free education funding. Amongst the 2.1 million employees of government some of them are bogus employees who are ghost yet they still receive a salary, that must be checked so that we do saving for free education.

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- e) The Private Sector involvement. A lot of money is within the private sector and it will be important to get more funding from the private sector. For example if all companies listed at the JSE can contribute 4% of the required funding for free education, only 25 companies can pay the full amount towards free education, when the companies increase then the percentage decrease but free education will be a reality in that regard.
- f) Reduce government spending in some sectors. We believe that certain ministries like the ministry of sport are not of high priority that education and healthy in terms of budget spending and allocation. Such budgets must be reduced and rechannelled towards free education.
- g) Deal with corruption and leakages can help to address our call for free education. Government Ministers who live a lavish lifestyle must be stopped so that such money is added to the funding of free education. When one minister goes out of the country and spent R300 000 just for one holiday, such money would have funded three students to receive free education. This applies to all official, deputies and managers. Various monies being lost through the tendering system should be tightened and stopped so that such monies can fund free education.
- h) Private individuals and the general public wishing to contribute to free education can be mobilised through government systems to fund free education. This will be added by making them understand the benefits accrued by the existence of graduates from free education.
- i) Increase government spending on free education will be the last but important addition to the money needed for free education. While South Africa is spending 0.75% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on higher education, the US and the UK spend 0.9% of GDP on higher education and Germany spends 1.1%. SAUS recommends that Government should increase the level of spending on higher education. Increasing Government's spending from 0.75% of GDP to 2.5 % of GDP will relieve the burden on students to fund their own education. This will go a long way in assisting in our call for free education. From 2012 data, the proportion of GDP for Brazil is 0.95%, Senegal and Ghana 1.4%, Norway and Finland over 2% and Cuba 4.5%. In South Africa, the 2015-16 budget for higher education is R30 billion. If the government were to spend 1% of GDP on higher education, this would amount to R41 billion – an additional R11 billion and almost four times the reported shortfall due to the 0% increase. If Cuba contribution is 4.5 % meaning that if what SAUS proposal of 2.5 % if to go by more than R55 billion will be raised into the funding for fee free quality education.

The following summarizes the proposal for free education as raised by the South African Union of Students which summarises the factors raised above;

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**Table 3: Introduction of fee free higher education; estimated total costs R 72 billion**

<b>Source of funding</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Collections from education tax	R20 billion
Conversion of current NSFAS into funding for free education	R 16 billion
Government GDP contribution	R 50 billion
Private Sector and private individuals contribution	R25 billion
<b>Total funding for free education</b>	<b>R106 billion</b>

The government will use its political power and legislative power to make effective the funding provisions that the South African Union of Students is proposing. We are of the conviction that the collections from various sources that are mentioned above will assist a long way to fund the introduction of free free higher education in South Africa.

### **Way forward and Conclusion**

- ❖ We envisaged to see the country introducing free education for the poor by 2017 because the demand for free education is an urgent demand that all the people knows by now as witnessed during the fees must fall.
- ❖ Students are the primary stakeholders in institutions of higher learning and therefore our submission supersedes all other submissions made by any other person hence we are optimistic that with the proposal we have put forward we are going to receive free education.
- ❖ That we are not entertaining any fee negotiations or any attempt to increase whatsoever up until this commission make a pronouncement about its outcomes because entertaining fee increase debates in campuses is interfering with the work of the highest commission on fee free education.
- ❖ The Student protest was suspended only when this commission was pronounced because we said we want to give this commission to do its work on free education. Students from time to time expect to hear progress about how far with the work of the commission.
- ❖ These are our written submission but we expect the commission to call us to give an oral submission and explain some of the issues contained in this document of submission so that you interpret it from an informed point of view.
- ❖ The South African Union of Students is optimistic that the free education commission will conclude its business and subsequently pronounce on free education. As a union of students we wish you well in compiling the good work for the poor and the working class and we are ready to clarify anything not clear contained in this document or our submission for the need for the introduction of fee free quality education.