

The President's Report

Dear Colleagues, Friends and Honoured Guests

It has been a very hectic year within our industry and somehow it seems to never come to an end. I'm sure none of us expected the #FeesMustFall campaign to kick off in the manner in which it did. This was definitely the highlight of the 2015 academic year. Despite the fact that some good came of the student protests, I must however strongly speak out against the violence that erupted and to a certain extent on how certain issues were dealt with at a National level. My biggest concern to date remains the manner in which Financial Aid Offices are dealt with at various institutions throughout South Africa. We as FAPSA have been in continuous discussions over this issue since the inception of FAPSA in 2001. Nonetheless, we continue to move forward as we always strive to the best practices within our industry.

This year we celebrate our fifteenth anniversary. Indeed another mile stone has been reached and we should applaud ourselves for the professional manner in which we, as FAPSA, have conducted ourselves to date.

FAPSA since 2001 has always played a pivotal role in determining what the Best Practices would be in assisting Financial Aid Offices and the Best Processes would be in assisting NSFAS and Donors alike in the management, administration and allocation of funds within the industry. Over the past few years we have been subjected to numerous changes within the industry, taking into account the student centered model of NSFAS, "Central Application System", system requirements and enhancements, changes in how we operate within our sector, etc. Change has always been accepted within our sector as we all believe in changing for the betterment and to improve the way in which we administer funding nationally and in compliance with our donors rules. We as FAPSA have been subjected to numerous changes over the years and thus our theme for this year's conference,

#Crossroads: Where to next?

As a result of the #FeesMustFall campaign, a Presidential Task Team was formed. The Deputy President, Ms Maupi and I were elected to serve on the task team. We definitely had our hands tied up and there was quite a lot of work that had to be done before the final report could be submitted for approval. The Presidential Task Team met bi-weekly and only met over weekends to ensure that our obligations to our current employment were not affected. This therefore meant flying up on Fridays evenings and returning back on Sunday mornings for a two month period. While this was a good learning curve, as well as exposure for FAPSA, it was at the same time very taxing on our families, as we only got to see them for a few hours over this period. Being a member of the PTT didn't mean only working on weekends over the task that were given to us, it literally meant working, seven days a week until the goals and objectives were met. The end result benefitted the HEI Sector and resulted in Historic Debt Funding being made available for the 2013 to 2015 academic years payable in the 2016 academic year. A new category of funding has also been made available, known as the KGODISO Fund, to assist students who fall within the Historic Debt Category, who meet the criteria for funding in terms of the NSFAS rules and regulations and who are continuing with their studies in 2016.

It was then stated that a new commission would be established to determine the way forward and develop New criterion to ensure that students are fully funded and to determine the level of funding required. A Reference Group has since been constituted by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, and FAPSA has once again been allocated a seat on this committee. The Reference Group is chaired by the Chairperson of the NSFAS Board and to date held two meetings. One of the key functions of the Reference Group is to solve the problem of funding for the so-called "Missing Middle". The Reference Group is set to conclude at the end of September 2016 and is required to provide solutions in addressing the challenges related to the Missing Middle.

In the 2017 academic year we will see the roll out of the New NSFAS Centred model. What challenges it will unfold, remain to be seen. We will also see the development and roll out plan for the new IKUSASA Fund designed to solve the problems of the so called Missing Middle.

In conclusion, I hope that at the end of this year's conference, we as the Financial Aid Officers of this country, will be given clear guidelines as to what are the challenges that lie ahead of us, and most of all will give us a good understanding of what is required of us, as we embrace the new developments within our industry. I strongly believe that communication will be key factor driving this new model and the time frames set in which these developments are being rolled out. We as FAPSA will always look after the best interest of our fellow peers, to ensure that the best practices are indeed what will benefit us and our students as we move forward in the new era that lies ahead of us.

I personally want to thank my current EXCO on always being pro-active and giving their best in ensuring that we strive to address all the resolutions as per our previous conference. There are still a few resolutions that still need to be addressed and we will ensure that these will be attended to and the outcomes made available to all delegates.

I wish you all the best and hope that you all will enjoy this year's conference.

Alberto Lai Wing
FAPSA President