



Presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG



**Parliament of the Republic of South Africa
17 March 2021**

Agenda

1. Applications, enrolment and registrations
2. A snapshot of Wits' income
3. Wits' challenges in the national context
4. The disbursement of NSFAS funds and allowances
5. Students' latest demands & Wits' concessions
6. Engagement with the SRC
7. Teaching and learning during 2020
8. Readiness for the 2021 academic year



Wits University remains committed to enabling as many students as possible to register, provided that they have applied for the 2021 academic year, meet the academic requirements, and can be accommodated within the resources that we have available.



Applications, Enrolment and Registrations

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Enrolment as at 12 March 2021

97% of Wits students are registered for the
2021 academic year

First Time Entering	5 807	Internal target of 5 182 (Full-Time only)
Postgraduate	12 110	Reached 75.5% of 2021 target. Year-end target of 16 027 will be reached with April, July, Sep intakes.
Undergraduate Returning	24 222 Full Time	Target 24 258 year end as per enrolment plan. Number will increase as we approach extended registration date of 19 March 2021.
TOTAL Enrolments	36 332 Full Time	Target is 37 000 – 38 000 year end (FT) <i>* Based on historic data of the last two years</i>

Demand for Quality Education

Category of Applicants	2020	2021
Postgraduate	28 879	29 413
Undergraduate (FTEN)	69 780	72 412
TOTAL	98 659	101 825

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Wits' Applications for 2021

Registration Process



- Online registration, completed via the web-based Self-Service portal, was actively promoted
- Online registration opened for returning students on 5 January and for new first year students on 24 February
- For students who were unable to complete the process online, assisted registration took place on campus from 16 February to 5 March 2021 in a venue on campus



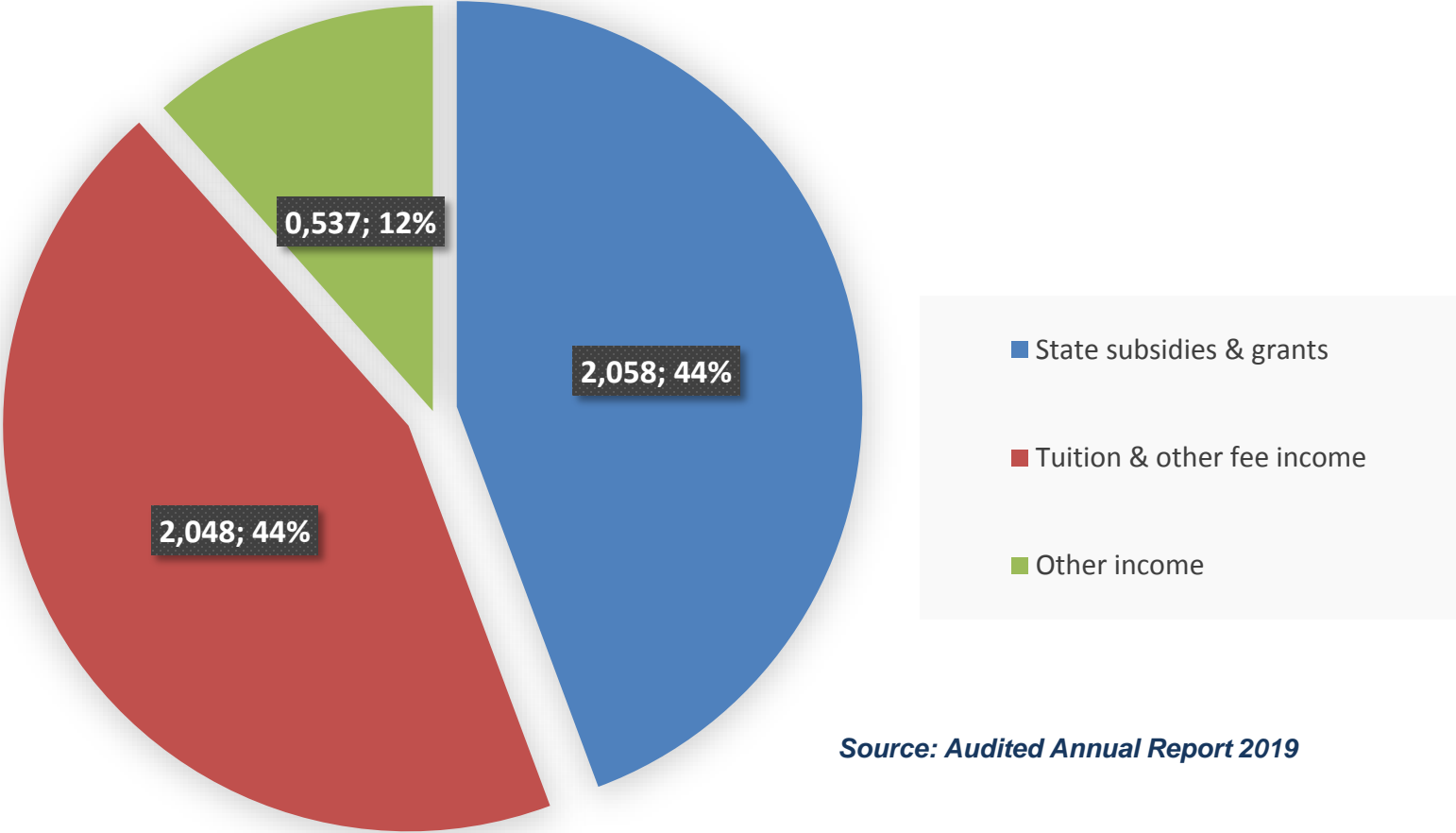
A Snapshot of Wits' Income

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Council-Controlled Income

2019
R'M
R4,643



Source: Audited Annual Report 2019

Financial Assistance for Wits students

- **Wits administers about R1 billion in student financial aid, scholarships and bursaries annually**
- **About 27 000 of Wits' 37 500 students receive some form of financial aid, scholarship or bursary support.**
- **Historically, about**
 - **12 200 were NSFAS-funded**
 - **14 000 were donor-funded**
 - **4 500 were funded via the Council budget**

Financial Assistance for 2021 Registration

R10 million Wits Hardship Fund

R10 million COVID-19 Relief Fund

R100 million in Scholarships & Bursaries

Multiple Fundraising Campaigns

Wits Hardship Fund & COVID-19 Relief Fund

- **1 351** requests for assistance
- **794** qualified and registered
- **557** applications being assessed by Friday



Wits' challenges in the national context

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The Missing Middle

- NSFAS provides financial assistance to qualifying students with a combined household income of up to R350 000 per annum.
 - Wits has a large cohort of missing middle students who do not qualify for NSFAS funding.
 - Students who have household incomes on the fringe of the NSFAS threshold, require financial assistance.
 - Some students do not qualify academically or do not meet NSFAS' administrative requirements, and require assistance.
 - NSFAS' confirmation of funding is not aligned to the University's registration period.



Historical Debt

- Wits has made many concessions in recent years, which allows students to register, but which contributes to the accumulation of historical debt.
- The downturn in the economy and the coronavirus pandemic has impacted on the ability of students and families to pay fees and to pay off debt.



The disbursement of NSFAS funds and allowances



NSFAS Funding in 2021 (1)

NSFAS informed universities that the initial payment previously paid in January would be paid in April for the year 2021.

Historically, Wits' policy is to pay disbursements for fee allowances and accommodation as an advance from the initial payment received from NSFAS.

This year, the Wits Council EXCO supported SET's decision for allowances to be paid for NSFAS-approved students upon registration, irrespective of the timing of the receipt of funds from NSFAS.

NSFAS guidelines for 2021 have not all been issued.



NSFAS Funding in 2021 (2)

Wits has received confirmation of funding for 6 419 students in 2021. In 2020, Wits had 9 645 NSFAS funded students approved.

Wits has not credited 2021 fee disbursements to student accounts, and is awaiting NSFAS payment, in line with established policy.

Wits is paying allowances as the academic programme starts. The Health Sciences Faculty started the academic programme in January and learning, travel and living allowances for January and February have been paid from the University's budget, whilst we await NSFAS funds.

Allowances for March 2021 for all students are currently being processed, so that they can be paid by 19 March 2021, whilst we await NSFAS funds.



The SRC's Original Demands and the initial response of the Senior Executive Team



NO	DEMANDS	RESPONSES/CONCESSIONS 2021
1.	Match rand for rand raised by the SRC towards its #20 Million in 2021 campaign.	Wits committed R10 million via the Wits Hardship Fund. Subsequently, an additional R10 million was committed via the Wits COVID-19 Relief Fund.
2.	Allow all capped NSFAS-funded students to apply to the Hardship Fund as these students are now responsible for accumulated debt and the interest thereon.	NSFAS funded students are provisioned for historical debt in accordance with NSFAS rules.
3.	Students who were rejected at residence due to 2020 financial reasons, should be allowed to return to residences. Further, the University should relax the N+2 residence policy.	R4 million of the R10 million Hardship Fund was allocated for residence financial assistance. The University has provided beds to address social justice cases. The University has implemented a policy of priority access to first year students.



NO	DEMANDS	RESPONSES/CONCESSIONS 2021
4.	Write off all interest for outstanding fees for the 2020 academic year.	No interest has been charged for current debt for the calendar years 2020 and 2021.
5.	Keep registration open until the end of March.	Registration has been extended to 19 March 2021 for undergraduate students and to 12 March 2021 for postgraduate students, in order to provide students with more time to register, and to ensure that students still fully benefit from the academic programme.
6.	Allow previous beneficiaries to apply to the Hardship Fund.	The Wits Hardship Fund is meant to provide once-off support to students who meet the criteria agreed to with the former SRC. Motivations from the SRC of exceptional circumstances are being considered, subject to the availability of funding.



NO	DEMANDS	RESPONSES/CONCESSIONS 2021
7.	<p>Students who qualify to receive assistance from the Wits Hardship Fund but due to the lack of funds must be allowed to register if they owe one hundred and fifty thousand (R150 000) or less.</p>	<p>The University assists students through the Wits Hardship Fund based on the mutually agreed criteria, within the overall available funds.</p>
8.	<p>All first years be allowed to return to campus.</p>	<p>The University has adopted a blended form of learning and teaching, and will adjust its programmes based on the trajectory of the pandemic, faculty requirements and spatial considerations. Applications by first years for residence accommodation are being prioritised.</p>

NO	DEMANDS	RESPONSES/CONCESSIONS 2021
9	<p>The University commits 30% of all the money raised toward the Centenary Campaign to clear student historical debt.</p>	<p>The Centenary Campaign has been promoted to donors as a long-term endowment fund. Some of the income will be used to fund missing middle students. The initiative has just started and has a nominal capital amount.</p>
10	<p>The 75% upfront payment fee be removed for African international students.</p>	<p>The Wits rules are consistent with global practice and sector policies. Provision has also been made for international students to apply to the Hardship Fund and through other funding support mechanisms.</p>
11	<p>All students who are self-funded and can provide reasonable evidence of retrenchment of their parents due to the pandemic be allowed to register.</p>	<p>The VC has proposed a COVID-19 Relief Fund, to address this category of hardship. Subsequently, a R10 million Wits COVID-19 Relief Fund was established to assist students whose families experienced hardship due to the impact of the coronavirus.</p>

**Summary of Latest Demands
made by the SRC and
Concessions made by
the Senior Executive Team
to assist students**



Summary of Latest Demands (12 March 2021)

Wits (and other universities) should postpone the commencement of the academic year to 30 March

All students must be allowed to register, irrespective of the quantum of debt owing to the University

All students must be allowed to graduate, irrespective of the quantum of debt owed

There should be no fee increases for 2021

All students who receive offers must be allowed to occupy residences immediately

Universities must pressurise government for a debt bailout for all institutions

All international students from the SADC and broader Diaspora must be allowed to register without having to pay 75% of the tuition fee upfront

All suspension orders must be uplifted with immediate effect

Concessions made by Wits (1)

Students who cannot afford the first payment can apply for a first payment postponement. First year students awaiting NSFAS outcomes utilised this concession to register.

All students who owe less than R10 000 are able to register.

Missing middle students with balances greater than R10 000 can apply for registration assistance by paying half of the outstanding debt due and making a payment arrangement to settle the balance of the debt during the year.

Students who are unable to pay for the current year by the payment due date, may enter into an interest-free payment plan to settle the debt over the course of the year.

Concessions made by Wits (2)

No interest was charged in 2020.

Wits refunded students for up to 70% for study materials not received, or services not rendered in 2020, and up to 25% of accommodation charges for the number of days not spent in residence.

Wits has made available R10 million through the Wits Hardship Fund to assist students who are experiencing financial hardship to register and secure accommodation.

An additional R10 million has been set aside through the Wits COVID-19 Relief Fund to assist students affected by the pandemic to register. This is in addition to the R100 million set aside for scholarships from the Council budget.

Wits is committed to assist all qualifying students who applied for registration via the Wits Hardship Fund (including students who were put forward by the SRC) by Friday, 19 March 2021. The SRC rejected this concession last night.

Engagement with the SRC

10 meetings (Jan – March 2021)



Teaching and Learning during the Lockdown

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2020 Academic Year

- The 2020 academic year was successfully completed in December.
- Wits switched to remote online learning and teaching within three weeks last year, and the academic programme ran mostly online.
- Some cohorts of students returned to campus in a controlled and coordinated way, as per the national COVID-19 regulations.
- Students were provided with laptops (couriered to their homes) and data (30GB per month).
- Selected websites were zero-rated by mobile network operators.
- All assessments, including those which required face to face examinations were completed in December, with deferred and special examinations completed in February 2021.



Readiness for the 2021 Academic Year

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2021 Academic Year is underway

- Wits' 2021 academic year commenced on 8 March 2021, with the majority of academic programmes going online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Exceptions are in health sciences, labs, etc.
 - On day 1, over 25 000 students logged on to the Ulwazi learning management system, (one of three used at Wits), with over 20 000 students continuing to log in daily.
 - Laptops are being couriered to students on request.
 - All students who request data receive 30GB per month.
 - Wits has negotiated for learning sites to be zero-rated by mobile network operators.
- Faculties will arrange for catch up classes and provide additional support for students who register late.



Return to Campus Plan

- The Return to Campus Plan has been modelled carefully to balance the academic and social justice needs of students, operational efficiencies, the spatial configuration of campus and the health and safety of staff and students while on campus.
- About 5 300 students are returning to residences. Spaces are allocated in the following order of priority:
 - Students invited to return by faculties,
 - first year students, and
 - students who require access to residences on social justice grounds.
- Students have been placed in single occupancy rooms or self-contained units.



Provision has been made for quarantine facilities.

Wits does not have the financial capacity to continue funding students who do not qualify for NSFAS, including the large cohort of missing middle students, given that the subsidy is flat (in real terms) and the University is making an increasing number of concessions each year to assist students.

THANK YOU

