



Ms Charity Morrison

HEDSA Secretary

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Registered at Universities South Africa (USAf) as a Community of Practice NPO no.: 078-484

Report on HEDSA NSFAS Disability Workshop

Date: 8 October 2024

Venue: DUT Ritson Campus Hotel School

Time: 09:00 - 16:00

Programme Director: Ms. Siphesihle Ngubo

Introduction

The HEDSA NSFAS Disability Workshop, held on 8 October 2024 at the DUT Ritson Campus Hotel School, provided an important platform to address the challenges faced by students with disabilities in higher education. The workshop underscored the need for inclusiveness across universities and highlighted the critical role HEDSA plays in advocating for the rights and support of students with disabilities.

Opening Remarks

Dr. Moreku welcomed the esteemed guests, emphasizing the necessity of establishing a stand-alone Disability Rights Unit, separate from student counselling services, to better address the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities across various universities. Dr. Moreku encouraged institutions to work together and share good practices. He highlighted the importance of NSFAS and thanked HEDSA for their good work.

Ms. Ngubo engaged the audience, encouraging them to share their expectations and insights for the workshop.

HEDSA EXCO

Dr. Nosiphiwo Delubom (Chairperson, NMU); Dr. Leila Abdool Gafoor (Vice-Chairperson, WITS); Ms. Charity Morrison (Secretary, UFS); Dr. Ashley Subbiah (Treasurer, UKZN); Dr. Maria Ramaahlo (Publicity & Communications, UJ) ;

Mr Nceba Nyanda (Co-opted member, Lovedale TVET college)

(Outgoing Chairperson – Martie Miranda (UFS))

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Workshop Purpose and HEDSA Objectives

Dr. Delubom expressed gratitude for the diverse representation from various universities and TVET colleges. She outlined the purpose of the workshop: to enhance the representation and support of students with disabilities through HEDSA. The main objectives were to:

- Address the lack of formal recognition of HEDSA by government bodies.
- Advocate for equal opportunities for students with disabilities.
- Identify and resolve the issues and inconsistencies across universities and TVET colleges.
- Understand the challenges faced by students with disabilities, particularly regarding access to information and resources.

Presentation by Mr. Balakrishna

Mr. Balakrishna discussed the evolving concept of disability as a social construct. Key points included:

- Disability should not be viewed as a fixed or inherent condition, but as a dynamic concept shaped by societal attitudes, policies, and educational frameworks.
- In higher education, it is crucial to recognize how institutions shape the experiences of students with disabilities.
- He highlighted the importance of inclusive policies and adaptive support structures to meet the diverse and changing needs of these students.
- The discussion explored the challenges and opportunities within the higher education sector to foster an environment where students with disabilities are fully integrated and supported.
- Mr. Balakrishna concluded by recommending ongoing training and awareness initiatives for faculty and staff to better understand and support students with disabilities.

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NSFAS Guidelines and Support for Students

NSFAS officials, including Ms. Nomalizo Sixholo, Ms. Ielhaam Tafari, and Dr. Faroon Goolam, provided critical information on the support and guidelines for students with disabilities, including:

- Funding provisions for assistive devices and laptops, along with a R10,000 book allowance for students with disabilities.
- Requirements for medical reports and recommendation letters from disability offices for NSFAS applications.
- Addressing the classification of students without disabilities incorrectly benefiting from the NSFAS disability support.
- Ms. Nomalizo emphasized the need for direct communication with students, rather than relying solely on the Student Representative Council (SRC).

Assistive Devices and Claims Process

Dr. Goolam shared insights into the technological applications of assistive devices and the claims process for students requiring financial assistance. Key points included:

- Students can apply for assistive devices valued up to R50,000.
- Necessary documentation includes medical reports, recommendation letters, and quotations for the devices.
- Clear guidelines on human support and associated claims were also discussed.

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Best Practices and Institutional Support

Several institutions shared their successful practices for accommodating students with disabilities, including:

- Designated residences for students with disabilities.
- Collaborations with special schools for recruitment and assistance with applications.
- Buddy systems where non-disabled students assist their disabled peers.
- Inclusivity and awareness training for resident advisors.

Action Plan and Resolutions

Key resolutions and action items from the workshop included:

- Establishing clear guidelines for financial aid and the roles of disability units.
- Proposing increased NSFAS staffing to improve response times for claims.
- Promoting collaboration between HEDSA and institutions.
- Developing an official letter for students with disabilities outlining their allowances.
- Organising road shows and exhibitions to raise awareness and provide resources for students with disabilities, including NSFAS application guidance.
- Strengthening the NSFAS system to prevent students without disabilities from benefiting from disability-related funding.
- HEDSA and NSFAS officially work closer together.
- NSFAS to consult HEDSA on issues of disability.
- HEDSA to be represented on the NSFAS board.
- Invite NSFAS officials to HEDSA EXCO meetings.
- Establish a reference group including students with disabilities. It is important to give students a platform to raise their concerns.

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Vote of Thanks

Dr. Subbiah delivered a heartfelt vote of thanks to all attendees, particularly commending Dr. Delubom for organizing the workshop. He highlighted the importance of collective efforts in advancing the rights of students with disabilities in higher education.

Dr Delubom encouraged institutions to pay their annual membership fees emphasizing that HEDSA will not be able to do its work if there is no money that is coming in.

Report Compiled by: Gugu and DRU team

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