

Full fees unfair – Kandjii-Murangi

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Observer



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Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, Dr Itah Kandjii-Murangi has said although educational institutions may be within their rights to charge full fees, from a moral point of view, it is unfair.

“It’s quite a very tricky situation for them and very difficult as well. If you speak from the moral side of things, it’s not fair to ask someone who has not been on your campus, who has not received any teaching, for full fees for the whole term. The best that these institutions could do is to work out the amount of teaching that was done. From there, they can see whether that can be charged as per the weeks where students were actually in classrooms. That is if indeed the student comes to de-register a few weeks into the semester, but if it’s way into the semester, it will be difficult,” she told *Windhoek Observer*.

She added however that, “Legally, I think the policies of each institution will bail them out, because they will have a cutoff point that says, if you start in January by March no one can de-register.”

She said provisions have been made between students and some institutions like the University of Namibia (UNAM) and Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) with regards to accommodation. Accommodation fees for the first semester have been waived. She called on private institutions to follow suit.

“The fact that students were not present on the various campuses really is justification for them not to be charged.”

Higher education institutions have been closed since a state of emergency was declared following the outbreak of COVID-19. Most institutions have continued their lessons online. However, most students in Namibia do not have e-learning infrastructure.

This comes as the Ministry has announced a N\$7 million fund allocated to Unam for the purpose of upgrading its server and data storage facilities. NUST will receive N\$2.4 million which will go towards the upgrading of its bandwidth.

Meanwhile a budget of N\$244 million has been allocated to support 32,000 disadvantaged students who have been unable to access e-learning. They will be assisted to purchase laptops and internet devices.

Acting CEO of the Namibia Financial Assistance Fund (NSFAF), Kennedy Kandume said that the institution will cover 50 percent of the cost of the laptops and devices at market value. Students will be required to come up with the remainder.

“Students of course who are unable to get these funds will not be left out as they will be able to enter into a special contract with NSFAF,” he said.

The Minister’s sentiments follow a Windhoek Observer report in which Namibia National Students Organisation (NANSO) Secretary-General, Patience Masua said it doesn’t make sense for education institutions to charge full school fees while face-to-face instruction in classrooms is not taking place.

“No institution can demand full costs if they don’t deliver services at full capacity. If you’re not paying for electricity, water, full salaries et cetera, there’s no way that you can demand full fees. Even if you’re doing online learning, institutions are not operating at full capacity. The service they’re providing is online and not a full-time service that students would ordinarily receive.

“If you don’t operate at maximum capacity you cannot demand 100 percent of the fees. It doesn’t make sense economically particularly because of the pandemic we’re facing,” said Masua.