



<b>TO:</b>	<b>Private Skills Development Providers Worker Education Initiatives Community-Based Organisations Non-Profit Organisations</b>
<b>CC:</b>	<b>DHET DDG Skills Branch</b>
<b>REF. NO.:</b>	<b>NSF External Circular 3 of 2020/21</b>

## **NSF GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES: PHASING IN OF LEARNING ACTIVITY RELATIVE TO THE EASING OF THE COVID-19 ALERT LEVELS**

### **PURPOSE**

To guide and direct all project partners implementing projects funded by the National Skills Fund (NSF) with regard to the following important measures:

1. Preparations for the commencement of learning activity post 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.
2. A phased-in commencement of learning activity informed by the risk-adjusted strategy for the entire Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector that is based on the national Covid-19 protocols.

### **BACKGROUND**

3. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, the South African Government, like many other nations, announced a national lockdown on 23 March until 16 April 2020. Following the rising number of cases, the lockdown was further extended until 30 April 2020. During the lockdown period, the NSF issued circulars to skills development providers providing minimum activities that should be undertaken as part of continuing projects. This includes the payments of stipends and compliance with the reporting requirements as set out in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOAs).



4. Given the continuing presence of risks around Covid-19, Government has determined that any abrupt lifting of the lockdown may prove to be contributory to the Covid-19 virus continuing to spread uncontrollably. To this end, Government has proposed a phased-in approach or a “soft lockdown” in which South Africans must continue to practice the correct habits of social distancing; screening; testing; handwashing and wearing of protective clothing as we continue to curb the spread of the virus.
5. In phasing out the lockdown, Government uses an alert system with levels of restrictions. Government announced from the lowering of the nationwide alert level 5 to level 4, in which some sectors of the economy resumed activity. Government will ease the levels, permitting more sectors to resume economic activity.

Level 1	<b>Low virus spread, high health system readiness</b>
Level 2	<b>Moderate virus spread, with high readiness</b>
Level 3	<b>Moderate virus spread, with moderate readiness</b>
Level 4	<b>Moderate to high virus spread, with low to moderate readiness</b>
Level 5	<b>High virus spread, and/or low readiness</b>

6. To this end, the NSF would like to direct and guide how project partners need to prepare for the continuation or commencement of learning activity as well as how they will need to phase-in and pace learning activity as part of a soft lockdown.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF NSF-FUNDED PROJECTS

7. The NSF proposes a risk-based approach in determining when to commence or continue with learning and mirror the various economic sectors of the country. The NSF proposed approach is as follows:
  - 7.1 Classifying projects into the different sectors of the economy including noting projects that may fall in more than one economic sector.



- 7.2 Using the risk-adjusted strategy to classify projects into the five Covid-19 alert levels. The alert system projects the probable risk level of the sector and how it should return to economic activity.
- 7.3 Utilising and cross-referencing known data about the extent of Covid-19 infection rates in the different provinces and districts to determine a locality-based risk profile for the training activities.
- 7.4 Subject to the future announcements on the lowering of the alert levels, the resumption of learning activity is based on the assumption that the country will move to different alert levels as follows:
- Level 4 to 3 in June (level 4 ending on 31<sup>st</sup> May and level 3 starting on 1<sup>st</sup> June)
  - Level 3 to level 2 from July to August (with level 2 starting on 1<sup>st</sup> September)
  - Level 2 to 1 in October, which assumes the remaining sectors have had more than four months of preparation of training activities.
8. In terms of the above approach, the NSF has determined the classification levels and commencement of learning for the different projects as follows:

Alert Level	No of projects	Sectors	Project Preparation & Learning Dates
4	57	Agriculture, Wholesale & Retail, Environmental	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2020 (preparation) 1 <sup>st</sup> July 2020 (learning)
3	58	Clothing & Textile, Government-related, Early Childhood Development, PSET Institutions	1 <sup>st</sup> August 2020 (learning)
2	24	Construction, Installation & Repairs	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2020
1	15	Food Service, Hospitality, Tourism	1 <sup>st</sup> October 2020
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>		



Note: Some projects straddle more than one sector and be may be permitted to partially start earlier for interventions falling in the permitted sector. The NSF notes that seven providers can start between June and July even though they fall into the lower alert system level.

## PAYMENT OF PROJECT FIRST TRANCHES

9. The NSF has not released the first tranches for new projects as was initially proposed owing to the uncertainty about the Covid-19 scenario. The NSF is aware that some SDPs have made representations to the NSF with regard to activities they have already carried out using own funds and requesting a partial payment of the first tranche.
10. The NSF commits to releasing first tranches in June for all newly-contracted projects. Where activities such as recruitment have commenced, the NSF will permit SDPs to defray such costs. All other funds should only be utilised only when learning has commenced following NSF approval.

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMMENCEMENT OF LEARNING

11. SDPs are encouraged to use the period until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 to do the following:
  - 11.1 Assess the readiness of the learning environment (classrooms, workshops, workplaces) to commence training by adhering to all the Covid-19 protocols (facilities are clean; social distancing, handwashing, sanitation).
  - 11.2 Assess the availability and adequacy of Covid-19 support materials for learners (face masks, gloves, sanitisers).
  - 11.3 Perform administrative tasks related setting up the projects including details of all learning sites (district, local municipality, street address and GPS coordinates) to ensure correct tracing in the event of any further outbreaks of Covid-19.
  - 11.4 Complete the Learning Environment Readiness Assessment (**Annexure A**) and submit to the NSF, latest by 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The NSF will provide written confirmation for learning to resume.



## ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LEARNING

12. It is suggested that learning only commence upon written confirmation by the NSF. The following guidelines should be adhered to:
  - 12.1 Care should be taken to ensure that class sizes do not violate social distancing rules. In cases where this is difficult, SDPs need to provide alternative learning approaches such as platooning i.e shorter learning time for two groups instead of one large group.
  - 12.2 Ensure that a temperature screening device (non-intrusive) is available to ensure a daily temperature screening for learners and facilitators before them entering the learning environment. NO SCREENING NO ATTENDANCE.
  - 12.3 Ensure that surfaces that are frequently touched (door handles, tabletops, desks) are cleaned with alcohol-based sanitiser before learners entering the classroom.
  - 12.4 Ensure there are handwashing facilities, sanitisers, ablutions facilities and that learners wear face masks. NO FACE MASK NO ATTENDANCE.
  - 12.5 Where practical establish learning environments closest to where learners live to limit the need to use public transport.
  - 12.6 Assess the time required to complete the learning programme and advise the relevant NSF project manager accordingly.
13. As a result of continuing efforts to manage and curb the spread of Covid-19, the NSF will require additional reporting requirements over and above those indicated in the MoA. The NSF requests your cooperation in this regard.



### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. The NSF is acutely aware of the additional burden the Covid-19 scenario has placed on the projects' budgets that were approved. Correspondingly, Covid-19 has had the same financial implication on the income of the NSF (and those of the SETAs) as a result of Government's decision to provide levy-paying companies with a four-month levy payment relief. This means the NSF will not be receiving any levies during these four months. While the NSF commits to looking at budget revisions, SDPs are requested to be frugal in their spending and to eliminate wastage of resources as far as possible.

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15. Owing to disruptions in implementation timeframes provided in the MOA, the NSF will carefully review this and provide for the extension of time to complete the projects. The NSF will advise of appropriate periods to action these change requests.

### ENGAGEMENT ON THE PROPOSED LEARNING COMMENCEMENT APPROACH

16. The NSF will convene engagement sessions with groups of providers to provide an opportunity for input into the proposals above. These sessions will be virtual and it is expected these will be convened in the last week of May 2020.

Once more thank you for your continued support during these challenging times and your commitment to improving the lives of our communities.

**Mr MV Macikama**

**Executive Officer: NSF**

**Date:** 22 May 2020

### Enquiries:

For more information please contact your Regional/Programme Director or Project Manager.