

Students sleep on the floor at CPUT amid housing funding blunder

By [Ella Morrison](#)

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The university says its own accredited and leased residences have already reached full capacity.



The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town has provided emergency accommodation to students while they try to find housing for them. But living in the university's crowded multipurpose hall has not been easy. Photos: Ella Morrison

- **About 100 students are sleeping with their belongings in the multipurpose hall at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) campus in Cape Town's city centre.**
- **Struggling to find accommodation, they have been living in the hall without mattresses or adequate sanitation facilities since 31 January.**
- **In late December, the organisation, OUTA, warned of a "student accommodation timebomb" as a result of NSFAS's cap on private accommodation allowances.**
- **Now CPUT says it received 72,145 residence applications but only has 15,291 available spaces for the 2024 academic year.**

About 100 students have been forced to start their academic year squatting with their belongings in the multipurpose hall at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) campus in Cape Town.

Most of the students, who have been living in the hall without mattresses or other furniture, have been struggling to find

accommodation since 31 January.

On 24 January Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande [announced](#) that National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) annual living allowances will be increased to R16,500 for university students. This will include a R3,045 personal care allowance and a R13,455 meal allowance per year.

Nzimande said the department also introduced accommodation caps for metro and non-metro areas. This means funds to students in private accommodations will be capped at R50,000 in metro areas, and R41,000 in other areas. “Students living in institution-catered accommodation qualify for a maximum allowance of R66,500 in metros and R57,500 in all other areas per annum.”

“Students who opt to make their own accommodation arrangements with immediate family or with relatives do not qualify for the accommodation allowance, [but] they qualify for a travel allowance, determined by the institution, up to R7,875 in 2024,” Nzimande stated.

But trouble at the embattled NSFAS appears to be continuing into the new year.

In late December, the Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) [warned](#) of a “student accommodation timebomb” as a result of the private accommodation cap.

“NSFAS announced that it needs 397,000 beds for NSFAS-funded students in 2024, but by 4 October 2023 the scheme reported to the Higher Education Portfolio Committee that there were only 25,803 (or 6.5%) of the required beds accredited.

“It is highly unlikely that there will be enough beds accredited by the time universities and TVET colleges start in January 2024,” said Rudie Heyneke of OUTA, in a statement.

Heyneke said that apart from lowering the accommodation allowance, private accommodation providers and institutions must now register their beds on the NSFAS accommodation portal at a cost of between R100 and R200 per bed.

“Only after payment will it be inspected to see if it complies with the minimum standards and norms as set by the Department of Higher Education. Once the accommodation is approved, a certificate of compliance will be issued, and only after that, accommodation – which NSFAS would pay – could be made available for students.”

Meanwhile, hundreds of students have been left stranded, without a proper place to sleep at night.

On Saturday, we spoke to several students sleeping on the concrete floor in CPUT’s multipurpose hall while they waited to be placed at a residence. All the students chose to speak anonymously, because they claimed the university had informally communicated that “troublemakers” would be suspended or de-registered. CPUT denied this allegation.



One of the female locker rooms is being used by scores of students living in the sports hall.

When GroundUp tried to take photos of students singing protest songs outside the emergency accommodation hall, we were asked to stop for fear of students being singled out by CPUT.

One first year student, who asked not to be named, told GroundUp she had been sleeping on the floor in the hall for two weeks.

“The NSFAS allowance [for private accommodation] is not enough in Cape Town,” she said. Her application to stay at a university residence is still pending. This was the case for about a dozen other NSFAS-funded students we spoke to.

Many of the students complained of having to share a handful of showers with cold water, and about 24 working male and female toilets.

Both female bathrooms had a strong smell at the entrance. We were told that these toilets were not being cleaned regularly. One had murky water on the floors and another had only one working toilet, both floors were covered with rubbish.

“We don’t have space to change or keep our stuff,” said a business administration student. She said a few cell phones had been stolen in the past two weeks because they had to be charged in public spaces.

Those who can afford to, have been buying their own food and bottled water, but most of the students in the hall are desperately waiting for their NSFAS allowances.

An email sent to students by CPUT’s Student Life and Residential Services department on 10 February, stated: “The University received an overwhelming 72,145 residence applications for only 15,291 available spaces for the academic period 2024. It is worth noting that in 2024 we increased our beds by over 2,000 spaces, up from about 13,000 in 2023.”

“As of 9 February, the university-owned accredited and leased residences have reached full capacity.”

NSFAS did not respond to our questions by the time of publication.

CPUT spokesperson Lauren Kansley said the university had one of the “most progressive student accommodation policies in the country” and housed more students than most universities - 43% of all students.

She said many of the students did not meet the academic requirements to stay in a university residence or applied too late to be placed, compounding the problem.

“At times, the university has helped to fund the shortfalls of NSFAS students in private accommodation after the cap was implemented. It’s not policy, but we don’t want our students to be vulnerable,” said Kansley.

On the bathrooms, she said: “The students have forced their way into that area, the staff may not feel safe. Those bathrooms are not intended to house students at all, never mind that many.” However, she said other bathrooms on campus had been made available.

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