

# BUSINESS UNITY SOUTH AFRICA

## Response to Draft Regulations for the Exemption of Parents from Payment of School Fees

### INTRODUCTION

Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) hereby submits its comments to the Minister of Education on the Draft Regulations for the Exemption of Parents from Payment of School Fees. While BUSA is the united voice of Business in South Africa, its members representatives are also parents and thus have a direct interest in the regulation of school fees.

### THE BUSA VIEW ON SCHOOL FEES

Business relies on the school system to prepare learners to an appropriate level for further development. Grade 9 can give Learners access to Learnerships to prepare them for employability. However, it is Grade 12, the final exit point of Further Education that really prepares learners adequately for lifelong learning and career development.

The South African Constitution not only makes Basic Education the right of every citizen, but also commits the state to finding the means to progressively increase its ability to provide Further Education.

Quality Education comes at a price and research has shown that South Africa is only able to afford to fully fund 10 years of schooling and that Grade R would require the equivalent funding of two school years. If full funding of Grade 1 to Grade 10 were to be implemented and Grade R and the remaining levels of schooling were to be solely funded from school fees, many disadvantaged children would never be able to attend school up until Grade 12. This in turn would increase the socio-economic imbalances in the country.

For these reasons, BUSA supports the partial state funding of all levels of schooling with the balance being funded from school-fees, whilst allowing for a regulated exemption from payment according to predetermined a formula.

### COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REGULATION

- BUSA supports the regulation of the exemption for the payment of School Fees by Parents who are unable to afford them.
- This regulation however appears to add to the Administrative burden of schools and of the Education system as a whole. This could result in increased costs. The changes proposed below will ensure that these costs are kept to a minimum.
- The onus for the payment of School Fees or the application for exemption must rest with the Parent/Guardian. The regulation appears to transfer part of this obligation to the Principal of the institution by expecting him/her to assist parent to complete the application to appeal. A Principal cannot be expected to undertake a process that directly contradicts the Governing Body of which he/she is an agent. It should be made know to parents that, unless fully exempted from paying

school fees, they remain responsible for the payment thereof.

- ❑ The requirement in paragraph 3(1)(e) that: “if a parent is in arrears by a month or more, the governing body must investigate the possibility as to whether or not the parent qualifies for an exemption” appears to be unreasonable. A brief study indicates that, even in well-resourced schools, most parents settle their accounts in excess of 60 days. Schools should be required to identify those parents that have a history of poor payments and request them to submit reasons, whilst reminding them of their rights to apply for an exemption if they are indeed unable to pay. A school cannot be expected to determine the financial position of every parent in arrears.
- ❑ Paragraph 3 should include a note to the effect that principals should be sensitive to the fact that, in some instances, parents may be illiterate. Schools should be sensitised to this and required to inform parents both in writing and verbally of the Annual school fees, their right to apply for exemption and measures that the school has put into place to assist them to complete the application.
- ❑ Paragraph 4 should include a clause that specifically states that the onus for the payment of school fees rests with the parent/guardian who is responsible for the account, unless exemption has been granted.
- ❑ While it would be ideal to identify parents whose financial position has improved and require them to start to pay school fees, it would be almost impossible to ‘police’ this. Parents should rather be required to apply for exemption at the beginning of each school year and afforded the exemption for the entire year, unless they volunteer otherwise.
- ❑ In both paragraphs 3 and 4 a clause needs to be added that binds the parties to confidentiality i.e. the Governing body, Principal, School Administration Staff and Parents.
- ❑ The idea of implementing a graded partial to full exemption is also supported as parents do vary in their ability to pay school fees.
- ❑ A means test, based on the combined income of both spouses/Guardians is the only objective means by which to evaluate the ability of the Parent/Guardian to pay or receive exemption. This however calls for a high level of confidentiality on the part of the school.
- ❑ The procedure for appeals is clear. However provision should be made for the eventuality that the school could become inundated with appeals and that the time lines may be compromised.
- ❑ This regulation seems to neglect the specific circumstances of Learners with Special Needs who are limited in the number of schools to which they can gain admission. They are forced by their circumstances to use public or private transport. This needs to be added into a special formula to deal with them.

## SUMMARY

BUSA, subject to the changes proposed above, is generally supportive of this regulation and urges the Minister to finalise its content so that it may be implemented without delay.