

Poor students can't go to university

Poor, academically deserving students cannot get a university education because of their financial position, the chairman of Parliament's portfolio committee on higher education Ishmael Malale, said on Wednesday (13 February).



"The debate is about access and the continued elitist thinking about education in our country which the government is funding," said Malale, after higher education department officials briefed the committee on the enrollment process at universities and Further Education and Training (FET) colleges.

Over 250,000 students have been enrolled at FET colleges, while registration at universities is continuing.

Higher education director general Gwebunkundla Qonde, told MPs government had succeeded in improving access to education through increased allocations to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and the National Skills Fund.

The allocation for FET colleges in 2010 was R310m, which increased to R1.7bn last year. The 2013 allocation stood at just under R2bn.

Qonde said while the increases were substantial they were not enough to provide bursaries to all poor or deserving students.

"If you come to universities you actually get confronted with the same picture of huge increases that have been made available by government into the system. Are they sufficient? No. Are they huge? Yes," Qonde said.

Malale and his fellow MPs were not convinced.

They said there were still too many cases of poor children who had excelled at school being excluded from higher learning institutions because they could not pay for tuition.

"The billions (of rand) which the state contributes to higher education indicates commitment to expand the system," said Malale.

MPs said no child who was performing well academically should be excluded from universities and FET colleges.

Soure: *Sapa* via I-Net Bridge

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