

Free fee system 'will not help poor'

By [Sipho Mabena](#) and [Ernest Mabuza](#)

15 Aug 2016

Advocates of free tertiary education must think again if they believe this will benefit the poor.



© Oleksandr Mudretsov – [123RF.com](#)

The Centre for Higher Education and Training made this argument Thursday, 11 August 2016, at the commission probing the feasibility of free university tuition.

Director Nico Cloete said the problem was that poor people did not qualify for higher education in large numbers.

"It is the middle class which go to the university," Cloete said, adding that the challenge for the government was to improve basic education. Cloete said of the one million children who started Grade 1 only 100,000 would enter university, and 53,000 of those would only graduate after six years.

"We have an expanding undergraduate system but low graduation rates," he said.

According to Cloete, poor students must be better selected, and when admitted better supported, not only financially and academically, but also socially.

"The implication is that the poor are in a revolving door; admitted to higher education but don't graduate, which leaves them with debt and some clearly angry," he said.

Cloete said there should be reputable post-matric alternatives such as technical vocational education, training colleges and apprenticeships so that university was not the only way out of poverty. He said the pressure on universities would destabilise the whole education system.

"If higher education is totally free, South Africa will have an exacerbated problem: students linger in universities and do not complete their studies," he said. University of Pretoria vice-chancellor Cheryl de la Rey agreed, saying the number of students from poor backgrounds who qualified for university was below 10,000.

About 75,000 who qualified for university were from affluent families, she said. A sliding-scale fee model in which tuition fees were based on household income should be considered, she added.

"Tuition fees should thus be seen as contributing a proportionate share of the effort to provide higher education and not designed to exclude anyone from participating in higher education."

Source: *The Times* via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>