

'University fee increase needs further input'

CONSULTATIONS on university fees for next year were ongoing, with Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande expecting to make an announcement within a month.

“The purpose of these consultations has been to tap into the collective wisdom of higher education stakeholders in order to find solutions to what is recognised as a societal problem. While considering the CHE (Council for Higher Education) advice, we want to ensure that academically capable young people are not denied access to higher education because they come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, while at the same time ensuring that universities are sustained and strengthened,” Nzimande said yesterday.

“We must work towards solutions that assist academically deserving young people whose families are struggling to raise sufficient funds to support them at university.”

The contentious issue of fees saw Nzimande cancelling a media briefing last month where he was to announce if tuition fees would increase next year.

Nzimande's office said he needed to consult further before making any announcement as student groups awaited his announcement and dared him to mention a fee increase for next year.

The minister had received a report on tuition fees from the CHE the day before.

Student groups such as the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command and the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (Pasma) withdrew participation at the judicial commission of inquiry into higher education fees, with Pasma labelling the commission “toothless” after the commission conceded it had no powers to effect a no-fee increment next year.

Universities have indicated they suffered heavy financial losses following the no-fee increase policy for 2016.

Most institutions said they relied on tuition fees and that student debt had risen sharply since the advent of the #FeesMustFall campaign by students.

Nzimande appealed for co-operation on student funding at higher education institutions and said consultations will continue for another two weeks. – ANA