



FOR PROFESSIONALS
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SA STUDENTS SAY COST OF TERTIARY EDUCATION IS FAR TOO HIGH – SURVEY

20 October 2015: A recent survey conducted among South African students has revealed that 62% of respondents believe that the cost of tertiary education in South Africa is far too high. The results mirror current university fee protests at some of the country's main universities: Wits, the University of Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes University and Stellenbosch.

The 2015 PPS Student Confidence Index (SCI) was conducted with nearly 900 students in their fourth year or above, studying at a university towards a profession-specific degree, such as engineering, medicine, law or accounting.

According to Motshabi Nomvethé, Product Specialist at PPS, the cost of tertiary education is clearly seen as a huge barrier to entry. "So many young people want to study further so that they can have access to the same opportunities as those who can afford to study, however the rising cost of education hinders them."

Last week, Wits University's students held a four day protest against a proposed 10,5% increase in fees. In media reports, Professor Adam Habib, the vice-chancellor of Wits University, has attributed the proposed above-inflation increase in fees to rising utility bills and the weak rand/dollar exchange rate. Wits University has now suspended the proposed hike, but this protest seems to have had a knock on effect with protests igniting at Stellenbosch University, UCT and Rhodes.

Nomvethé says something needs to be done to bring down the cost of tertiary education. "Universities are not only funded by student fees, but Government subsidies and third stream income also contribute. Government must recognise the value of generating skilled professionals to ensure key skills – such as medical doctors, engineers and lawyers - are developed and retained in the country. It is time for Government to look for ways to increase its funding to universities."

Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande told delegates at the Higher Education Summit that the Government intends on regulating university fees and meetings with vice-chancellors must be setup to discuss fee increases that are higher than inflation.

In addition to the issue of fees, the respondents also revealed a lack of confidence in Government's economic policies' ability to stimulate job growth, which could mean more students are looking abroad when it comes to job opportunities, says Nomvethé.

According to the survey 61% of respondents said they are not confident that the Government's economic policies will create sufficient growth to create employment. In addition, 56% of students surveyed would consider moving abroad for work purposes in the next five years.

The results of the survey show that Government needs to instill confidence in the minds of students in order to retain the skills that the country is currently educating, says Nomvethé.

She points to another finding of the SCI that 76% of respondents said they keep updated about economic and political issues that affect the country. "University students are ensuring that they stay on the pulse of the beating issues of the country, showing that they are not sticking their head in the sand. If they perceive that there are better opportunities abroad then they will not be dissuaded from leaving the country."

On a positive note, when students were asked if they partake in voluntary work, internships and mentorships programmes in their field of study, 51% said yes, while 46% said 'no but they would like to'.

This is incredibly positive and is in line with the findings of a PPS member survey of its graduate professionals, says Nomvethé. "Of the 225 respondents, 80% of them would offer one hour or more of their time per week to offer mentorship advice to students."

Internships can offer valuable work experience and assist students to build relationships and connections so that they have a better chance of securing employment once they finish their studies, she says.

The survey has revealed a number of pertinent issues that Government must address in order to not only ensure the future professionals of the country can be created but are also retained, concludes Nomvethé.