



Free Public Higher Education by 2020

**Presentation of the YCLSA to the Commission of Enquiry into Higher
Education and Training
29th September 2016**

Introduction

- 1) The Vision and Perspectives of the YCLSA on Higher Education and Training.
- 2) The evolution of higher education in South Africa.
- 3) The International Experience.
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- 5) Free Higher Education is Feasible.
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The Vision and Perspectives of the YCLSA on Higher Education

- Founded in 1922 as a Marxist – Leninist youth political formation.
- Representing poor, working class youth.
- Principles of non-racism, non-sexism and equality.
- Currently almost 100 000 members.
- Our vision for higher education is the realization of Free Public Higher Education by 2020.
- Higher education must be treated as a public good, not a private privilege.

The Vision and Perspectives of the YCLSA on Higher Education

- Access and Success without students having to pay.
- The State must pay and Private Sector must pay.
- The Private Sector must pay on terms determined by the State, not on their own profit – maximising terms.
- Transformation of Curriculum and reconfiguration of institutional autonomy.
- Addressing all barriers to the provision of free public higher education before 2020 – Lack of Infrastructure, Academics etc.
- Ultimately we seek a new and transformed higher education landscape by 2020.

The Evolution of Higher Education in SA

- Education is not a neutral phenomenon.
- Apartheid regime used education as a instrument of oppression.
- Black historically disadvantaged institutions versus white historically advantaged institutions.
- Huge infrastructure backlogs, unequal class sizes and poor quality education for the majority are legacies of Apartheid.
- Those from poor, rural and working class households continue to face systemic exclusion both academically and financially.
- The current higher education system post – 1994 is a product of oppression crafted on the basis of class, race and gender discrimination.

The Evolution of Higher Education in SA

- The production and reproduction of historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged higher education institutions (HEIs).
- Why do we still have University of Zululand and University of Venda post – Apartheid?
- Post – 1994 we attempted to ‘merge’ existing institutions to address the imbalances and inequities.
- We should have started the process of building new institutions in 1994 instead of merging existing ones.
- 22 years of democracy has only produced 3 new institutions of higher learning.
- The current administration must be commended for realizing the need to build new institutions to address legacies of Apartheid.
- The Mbeki administration failed to do this.

The Evolution of Higher Education in SA

- Today much progress has been made in ensuring access.
- 3 new universities, TVET College intake has doubled in the last 5 years.
- Less progress in terms of throughput rates and transformation.
- Demand for higher education continues to outstrip the supply of higher education.
- Content is dominated by Neo-liberal thinking and research –driven institutions focus very little on local socio - economic issues.

The International Experience

- In Germany, public higher education is free.
- In Venezuela, public higher education is free.
- In the State of Kerala, India, public higher education is free.
- Cuba, Sweden etc.
- These countries implemented free public higher education through a grant system.
- Why not explore the models being implemented in one of these countries to adapt and implement in SA?

Challenges facing the System

- The commodification and commercialization of higher education remains the biggest challenge.
- Deserving students from poor, working class backgrounds are denied access because they cannot afford.
- Loans from NSFAS have led to highly indebted student population.
- Unemployed graduates fall victim to unpaid loans while some who can afford choose not pay back their loans.

Challenges facing the System

- NSFAS allocation is insufficient.
- The question of the missing middle.
- The private sector not doing enough. Existing bursary programmes are exclusive – For example, One private company in KZN only provided bursaries for white female students.
- The high walls of institutional autonomy.

Challenges facing the System

- Not enough institutions of higher learning.
- Not enough classroom space.
- Not enough academics.
- Above inflation fee increments.
- Internal inflation use to justify high fee regimes but 60% of University costs go to salaries, not books.
- Demand for higher education continues to outstrip the supply of higher education.

Free Public Higher Education is Necessary and Feasible

- The State does have the money. What is required is a redirection of resources.
- Redirect resources in the national budget away from fancy jets, corruption, non-performing government departments and other areas of wastage.
- Direct more of the national fiscus to the department of higher education and training.
- Minister Blade Nzimande has already commissioned a report that was presented to cabinet on the exact cost of providing free public higher education.
- That report must be adopted and implemented and the department of higher education must receive the budget stipulated in the report.

Free Public Higher Education is Necessary and Feasible

- A higher education qualification is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for employment in modern day society.
- Higher education must be viewed as an investment to society and not a cost.
- The benefits of providing free public, high education far outweigh the costs.
- Greater human capital for reindustrialization, greater levels of economic participation, etc.

Recommendations

- Distinguish between 'free' education and 'fee -free education in the immediate.
- Transform NSFAS into a well capacitated vehicle for the implementation and administration of free public higher education.
- NSFAS should gradually phase out loans and only offer bursaries.
- No to the privatization of higher education.
- The privatization of services in institutions of higher learning must be phased out.
- Tax private companies with higher education tax to fund free higher education.

Recommendations

- Tuition fees must be abolished and a grant introduced for students.
- Upfront payment of fees must be abolished.
- Late payments of fees must not lead to academic exclusion or a refusal to release results.
- Application fees must be abolished as this has a significant impact on the poor and rural youth.
- The Department of Higher Education and Training must be expanded.
- Implement free public higher education by 2020.