



GETFund: STOP PLANS TO AWARD FOREIGN MASTERS SCHOLARSHIPS NOW!

Introduction

Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch) and the Institute for Education Studies (IFEST-Ghana) have cited an advertisement by the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund) calling for applications for Foreign Masters Scholarships. According to Section 2(2b) of the GETFund Act, 2000 (Act 581), the Fund is to provide supplementary funding to the Scholarship Secretariat, for granting scholarships to brilliant but needy students to study in second cycle and accredited tertiary institutions in Ghana, and NOT directly administer Foreign Scholarships.

Unapproved expenditure

In March 2024, Parliament approved a GHC 3.9 billion allocation to GETFund, based on a specific distribution formula which did not include GETFund Scholarships. Plans by GETFund to spend directly on Foreign Scholarships in 2024/25 are therefore outside the approved expenditure items in the 2024 GETFund Formula approved by Parliament, and thus, illegal.

Non-responsive students' financial assistance regime and Gross Tertiary Enrolment

In 2017/18, from a baseline of ¹16.97%, Ghana set a target of 40 per cent Gross Tertiary Enrolment (GTE) by 2030, ensuring higher proportions of free Senior High School (SHS) graduates access to tertiary education. After five (5) years, the 2023 GTE attainment level of 19.20² per cent, amid a 34 per cent³ secondary-tertiary transition rate must be concerning to the Ministry of Education, especially when Ghana is recording unprecedented 60 per cent WASSCE Pass Rates in Core Subjects. The increasing financial access barriers to tertiary education is real.

GETFund has a mandate to support the Student Loan Scheme to provide financial assistance to needy students to access tertiary education. The Scheme is, however, grossly underfunded, preventing about 30 per cent

¹ Ministry of Education (2018). Education Strategic Plan 2018-2030.

² GTEC Presentation to Parliament in December 2023.

³ GTEC Data on Tertiary Admissions for 2022/23 academic year.



of applicants from accessing the loan. Even for those receiving approvals, funding is an issue, as the underfunded scheme remain in arrears for the past academic year, causing some students to either drop out of tertiary education or engage in menial jobs to survive⁴.

The average student loan amount of GHC 2,250 a year cannot cover the cost of funding tertiary education in Ghana for just the first month of study, let alone the entire year. This, compared to the average cost of a One-Year foreign Masters Scholarship (GHC 400,000), makes it unconscionable for GETFund to even conceive the idea of awarding foreign Masters scholarships in Ghana today.

Foreign scholarships and Value For Money

A review of non-bilateral public foreign scholarships in Ghana indicates that, over 95 per cent of the programmes are not only available locally in Ghanaian Universities, but cost 20 times more to study abroad. This does not assure Value For Money, and must be discouraged in line with His Excellency, the President's pledge to protect the public purse.

Unprioritized spending

Ghana is in a period of economic difficulty characterised by expenditure cuts, increased taxation and the need for prudent spending of limited local revenues. The decision to spend scarce education sector resources on foreign scholarships for Masters students who end up studying courses existing in Ghana is not just wasteful, but does not represent prioritised spending in a sector with over 5,000 basic schools under trees, sheds and dilapidated structures in the 21st Century.

Reforming Public scholarships - The big picture

The 2019 GETFund Performance Audit Report which audited scholarships from 2012 to 2018 found that the GETFund Secretariat acted outside its mandate by directly administering scholarships, instead of funding the Scholarship Secretariat to administer public scholarships.

The Auditor-General recommended that GETFund abides by Section 2(2b) of the GETFund Act, desist from administering foreign scholarships, and

⁴ Eduwatch (2023). Financial Assistance Responsiveness Study.



rather transfer funds to the Scholarship Secretariat for the administration of scholarships.

This recommendation of the Auditor-General, which has since 2020 been upheld by GETFund, must continue.

We appreciate that the Scholarships Secretariat and the public scholarship system have severe transparency and accountability deficits. However, Eduwatch and IFEST will continue to work with the government to pursue a legal and institutional reform to improve transparency, accountability and effectiveness, as outlined in Eduwatch's 9th April, 2024 Call for Scholarships Reform.

The reform proposals include the legal and institutional strengthening of the Scholarships Secretariat into a single scholarships Authority managing all public scholarships, and accountable to Parliament, and the decentralisation of tertiary scholarships to public tertiary institutions, under the regulation of a Scholarships Authority.

In light of the above, the following demands are respectfully made:

1. The Minister for Education instructs GETFund to cease the ongoing Foreign Scholarship Application process.
2. Parliament injuncts GETFund from spending on Foreign Scholarships, not just because it is unapproved by Parliament, but also amounts to wasteful spending of taxpayers' money.
3. The Presidential Candidates in the upcoming elections commit to reforming the public scholarship system to make it meritorious, effective, efficient, transparent and sustainable.

Accra, 10th June, 2024.