

1,000 students petition govt over tuition loans

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KAMPALA: About 1,100 students, who missed out on tuition loans have appealed to government to reconsider them.

However, the executive director of Higher Education Students Financing Board, Mr Michael Wanyama, told *Daily Monitor* that they are overwhelmed with the appeals for financing yet they need an extra Shs5.1 billion which is not readily available to meet the requests.

"We need an additional funding to support another 1,500 students who had the minimum requirements to qualify them as needy students for the loan but we don't see it. We are trying to follow up for a supplementary budget," Mr Wanyama said.

Mr Teddy Febbi Abubakari, who was admitted to Ndejje University on

a Bachelor of Civil Engineering, was considering to return home on Friday after he was not considered among the 1,834 successful applicants two weeks ago.

"I have no option. I have appealed. If I don't get, I will go back home in Mbale and try again next year," Mr

Abubakari said.

The board statistics show that out of 7,310 students who applied to study on the government loan scheme, 4,726 were eligible but the board has money for only 1,834 applicants.

On average, the board spends Shs4 million per student annually.

GOVT PLAN

Student loans. Every financial year since 2014, government puts aside Shs5 billion for loans to needy students who qualify for science courses but lack funding to continue with their studies in institutions of higher learning. However, the number of applicants for the loans has been increasing each year.

Unemployment. In 2017, National

Planning Authority survey showed that while 700,000 people join the job market every year, only 90,000 get employment. This translates into 87 per cent of people ready to work but can't find a job.

With this high unemployment rate, it is unclear how government will recover the loaned money if there are no job opportunities for the debtors.

The scheme does not cater for those who fail while on study unless one was genuinely sick and can prove this. The loan, which is revolving, only covers students' tuition, functional fees, aids and appliances for persons with disability.

So far, the board should be recovering loans from 1,700 students who completed their studies and the one year grace period.

The money is recovered in phases from the time the beneficiary gets a job.

Mr Wanyama said they projected to collect Shs500 million this year from those who finished their studies but have only recovered Shs100 million.

"We started recovering the loans from those who completed. We have recruited officers and the journey has just started," Mr Wanyama said.