

## ZIMBABWE: Brain drain graduates must repay state aid

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Zimbabwean university students who receive state assistance are now required to surrender a third of their salaries if they choose to work in foreign countries on completing their studies. The cash-strapped government has set up a special cadet scheme whose stringent conditions it hopes will stem a crippling brain drain that has hit most of the country's economic sectors.

The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education has come up with conditions and a memorandum of agreement for special cadets - students who access state funds to pay for their studies.

"A person appointed as a special cadet shall (a) serve the country and be bonded for a minimum period equal to the period he/she was engaged as a special cadet. (b) Remit a minimum one third of his/her salary in forex, if he/she opts to work outside the country," reads part of the memorandum.

"In such cases a special agreement will be entered between Zimbabwe, the cadet, and such country/employer concerned for remittance of forex for a minimum period equal to the duration he/she was engaged as a special cadet."

The memorandum continues: "The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education will assist the special cadet with funds to meet educational costs during the time when he/she is on the cadetship scheme. No special cadet or prospective employer would be allowed to buy the bonding period or part thereof for any student trained under the cadetship scheme."

Since Zimbabwe adopted the use of foreign currencies and abandoned the Zimbabwe dollar in February last year, to escape the effects of crippling inflation, many students have dropped out because of their inability to raise fees in the required United States dollars, South African Rands or Botswana Pulas.

As a sign of desperation brought about by failure to raise foreign currency fees in a country where most state employees earn less than US\$200 per month, last month 12 University of Zimbabwe students were arrested and appeared in court for attempting to enter examination rooms using fake receipts.

However, the government is unlikely to be able to assist significant numbers of students with its cadetship programme because the precarious state of its finances.

Recently Minister of Finance Tendai Biti announced that while the country's budget had sought to raise US\$800 million from donors, only US\$3 million has been realised. Biti added that the balance of payments position remained precarious with 2009 exports pegged at US\$1.6 billion against imports of US\$3.2 billion.

To make matters worse, local universities are no longer able to offer financial assistance to students, as was the case in the past, due to the financial crisis.

A note sent to students by the University of Zimbabwe ahead of the second semester opening on 10 May said:

"Financial assistance - the division currently has no resources to assist students in financial distress. However, you are encouraged to forward your names to the Dean of Students office just in case we secure something. Attach documents or information that would enhance your chances of receiving support eg parents death certificates or an affidavit confirming inability to pay."