

## More students to benefit from loan scheme

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The number of new beneficiaries of the student loan scheme is set to double to about 3,000 for next year's intake as the education ministry earmarks more funds for the scheme.

The loan scheme was set up three years ago to support highly qualified but underprivileged students, to increase equitable access and ensure regional balance in higher education.

Since its inception in 2014, the scheme has supported 5,259 students to pursue undergraduate and diploma courses, even though the figure represents a fraction of deserving candidates.

The loan scheme covers students' tuition fees, functional fees and research fees, as well as special aids and appliances for persons with disabilities.

This year, 1,460 candidates were selected to benefit from the scheme out of over 4,218 who applied for the fund. The increase in the number of beneficiaries was meant to start this year, but the move was shelved owing to budget cuts.

Michael Wanyama, the executive director of the Higher Education Students Financing Board (HESFB), told *New Vision* yesterday that a higher budget was needed to meet demand for student loans.

"We are keen to ensure that more students benefit from the scheme, but this is dependent on funding. Our budget has increased and we will expand the number of beneficiaries," he stated.

The budget allocation for the student loan scheme has increased gradually from sh6b in 2014 to sh23.3b this year and sh34b has been set aside for next year.

Sixteen public and private chartered universities, in addition to 33 other tertiary institutions have been enlisted to administer the students' loan scheme.

### BETWEEN THE LINES:

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### Arts courses considered

For the first time, a few students pursuing arts-related courses were considered for funding, but only under affirmative action targeting students with special needs.

A total of 13 students with disabilities were selected to pursue undergraduate degrees in law and arts in education under the scheme. More undergraduate courses in humanities, including social sciences and psychology, were being considered for funding under the loan scheme.

The arts courses are chosen based on guidance from the National Planning Authority and are linked to efforts to address human resource gaps, Wanyama explained.

Beneficiaries have a one-year grace period after leaving school before they are required to start repaying the loans to government.

Males have dominated the list of beneficiaries for undergraduate courses over the last four years, while females have dominated the list for those pursuing diploma courses under the loan scheme.

Government targets to raise the number of students joining higher education under the loan scheme to 5,297 annually by 2020, according to the new Education and Sports Sector Strategic Plan.