

NEWS

## Varsities set to select own students

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IN SUMMARY

- Varsities set to select own students as admissions board likely to be scrapped

The board in charge of student admissions to public universities will be scrapped, if proposals by a government team are adopted.

Each university, according to the proposals made public on Monday, will be given powers to admit its own students.

This means that the Joint Admissions Board (JAB), an organisation that has independently selected students for more than two decades, could be scrapped.

The board — together with a team of deans of faculties, principals and vice chancellors of public universities — meets every year to set a cut-off point for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education qualifiers to be admitted to the colleges.

“Responsibilities of JAB would cease upon delegation of student admission authority to individual universities and colleges,” said the report.

It is the latest assault on the board, which has won praise for streamlining university admissions, compared to entry into middle level colleges that is riddled with corruption.

In the early 2000s, a former Kenyatta University vice chancellor, Prof George Eshiwani, called for the disbandment of the board.

He argued that the introduction of parallel degree courses, through which universities admit students independently, had made the board irrelevant.

JAB has been in charge of determining the criteria of admitting at least 10,000 new students to universities every year.

Last year, however, the board selected 17,000 students following the creation of more than 10 new colleges and campuses.

Currently, there are 150,000 students in the university system compared to about 120,000 two years ago.

Parallel degree students constitute nearly half of that number.

Among the team that prepared the recommendations were Kenya Polytechnic University College principal Francis Aduol and Higher Education Loans Board secretary Benjamin Cheboi.

The team, which included international experts, was put together by the Higher Education Ministry and the World Bank.

Other team members were a professor of higher education at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Dr Bruce Johnstone, and Ms Pamela Marcucci, a project manager for the International Comparative Higher Education Finance and Accessibility Project at the same university.

Dated November 29, the report recommends that a new team comprising officials from the ministries of Higher Education, Finance, and MPs be formed to determine government financial allocations to each public university annually.

The document, *Financing University Education in Kenya: A Report to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology*, predicts a crisis in the future in which many Form Four students qualify for limited university places given the free day secondary schools.

It calls for more exchequer funding to universities.

