

HE Summit gives voice to burning issues

20 October 2015 - The first day of the Transformation Summit on higher education looked at eradicating the remnants of the apartheid education system at universities.

Delegates agreed that burning issues such as language policy, institutional culture which seems unwelcoming, funding and housing for students should be addressed urgently.

Robust as the summit was, there was appeal from students to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande to review the act of institutional autonomy as part of strengthening transformation.

When addressing the stakeholders from all spheres of the academic community, the Minister said high levels of frustration were being experienced by students in areas where transformation was not taking place or was taking place slowly.

He said: "This Summit aims to give space to a wide range of voices, to build, where possible, consensus, or at least a better understanding on where we disagree and how to disagree, and what the priority areas are which we collectively need to address."

This, he said, was an opportunity to engage on the issue of accelerated transformation in higher education.

Since the first Summit in 2010, DHET has undertaken a wide range of identified initiatives.

Some of the most important include major reviews of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, including the costing and a plan on how to implement free higher education for the poor, the provision and conditions of student housing and the funding of universities, the Minister told the delegates.

The leader of South African Union of Students, Sakhisomeleze Badi, who is a beneficiary of National Student Financial Scheme (NSFAS) requested that the private sector assist poor students who are academically deserving with study fees and also contribute to NSFAS.