

Contact: Prince Armah, PhD
Executive Director, VIAM Africa
Email: edirector@viamafrika.com
LinkedIn: <http://tinyurl.com/jmtesuf>
Twitter: @pkarmah

UK Office
18 Seaton Drive
Aberdeen, UK
AB24 1UT
Phone: (+44) 1224951524

Ghana Office
No 5 Whistler St, Tesano
P. O. Box 4104
Keneshie, Accra
Mob: (+233) 502109029



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VIAM CALLS ON THE GHANA GOVERNMENT TO REMAIN RESOLUTE AND STEADFAST ON ITS DECISION TO ABOLISH ALLOWANCES FOR TEACHER TRAINEES, BUT SHOULD IMPROVE QUALITY AND EQUITY ISSUES

ABERDEEN, UK, December 22, 2015- VIAM Africa Centre for Education and Social Policy wishes to advise the Government of Ghana to remain resolute and steadfast on its policy decision to abolish allowances for teacher trainees, while calling for broader stakeholder consultations to address quality and equity issues. We also urge opponents of the policy to proceed from an evidenced-based perspective of their policy stance, rather than emotional arguments.

The allowance paid to teacher trainees at the Colleges of Education (CoEs) of Ghana was introduced in the 1960s as part of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's agenda to attract more people into the teaching profession. The policy was repealed in the early 1970s but had to be reinstated in the 1980s following the mass exodus of Ghanaian teachers to Nigeria. In 2012, the Government replaced it (with a tertiary student loan). Three major reasons underlie the current policy direction as captured by the Government's Education Strategic Plan covering 2010-2020. First, CoEs had been upgraded into tertiary institutions following the passage of the Colleges of Education Act (Act 847 of 2012), and in so doing, payment of trainee allowances was no longer justified. Trainees would have to apply for funding as their colleagues at the universities that provide initial teacher training services (e.g. University of Education, Winneba [UEW] and University of Cape Coast [UCC]). Second, the training colleges admitted students based on government allocated quota of trainee allowances, resulting in limited intake despite availability of facilities for more student teachers. Therefore the removal of the quota system meant that COEs that had capacity could increase their intake. The third reason appears to have been influenced by the Government's commitment to significantly reduce the wage bill at the basic education level (primary to junior high school). According to The World Bank, about nine thousand teacher trainees enrolled every year resulting in estimated student population of 27,000 which currently represents about 10 percent of basic education' wage bill.

Opponents of the policy have largely argued that, removal of the allowances would impede access to the CoE, and rather create more problems than what it seeks to cure. According the Ghana National Association Teachers and other civil society groups, withdrawal of the allowances would result in lower enrolment since it would increase the cost of education for applicants. This, they argue, would further exacerbate the problem of teacher shortage facing the country. On the contrary, official reports indicate that there has been a significant increase in enrolment at the CoE since the withdrawal of the allowance for teacher trainees, from 9,000 students in 2013 to 15,000 students in the 2014 academic year (60% increase). However, this could also be attributed to a number of factors including the fact

that two cohorts of senior high school students completed their programme in that year.

Having considered these varying positions, VIAM Africa is of the considered opinion that the policy decision to abolish allowances for teacher trainees needs to be maintained, although mechanisms for broader stakeholder consultations to address quality and equity issues need to be factored into the policy discussions. We outline our main arguments as follows:

The withdrawal of the allowance has ultimately led to the abolishment of the quota system thereby increasing enrolment rates. Hitherto, the allowances had created a perverse set of incentives creating an artificial ceiling on student intake. The limitations on student enrolment at the CoEs should be on the basis of available facilities and not quotas.

Given that high number of already trained teachers are awaiting appointment to the service due to financial constraints, we think that it is more financially prudent in the short to medium term to expend the foregone allowances to get these already trained teachers into the classrooms to deliver much needed tutelage instead of having to wait another three years. This is particularly important given the freeze on net employment across the government service sector, especially in all public schools, as a result of budget conditionality and an already constricted education budget of which greater proportion goes into compensation of employees.

Positive impact on public finances as this frees up liquidity for the government which can be used for other pressing social interventions such as building classroom blocks and providing more instructional resources. Students borrow from SNNIT of which the amount stays on their balance sheet as compared to the government's budget. Payment terms spread over many years thus reduces the burden on students (minimal impact). Amount given the students now is much bigger than the old allowances and thus gives them much bigger consumption power.

Special funding/sponsorship beyond the current student loans scheme should be made available for anybody who wants to go into teaching which should not be automatic, but applied for. There are several approaches that can be adopted but we suggest two perspectives. First, a meritorious grant system that awards a stipulated fund to high achievers from West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations to train as teachers for the basic education sector. These students should then be put on a career pathway that leads to advanced practitioners in their field and future leaders in the sector. The second approach is to award special grants to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Whilst the withdrawal of the allowances could potentially increase access due to the abolishment of the quota system, this arrangement would adversely affect less privileged individuals from accessing teacher training education which raises equity issues. For this reason, the Government through the Metropolitan and District Assemblies should adopt need-based assessment of individuals who have strong commitment to train as teachers but have no secure funding source, and might not qualify under the student loan scheme.

Beyond the scraping of the allowance, we recommend that trainee teachers must be offered the opportunity to live their own life and take responsibility for their action, in order to develop the requisite attitude and values they would need to succeed as leaders of their classrooms. They must be

afforded the opportunity to experience the social life that their colleagues in other tertiary institutions enjoy. We recommend the provision of hostel facilities instead of the present boarding system as in the case of all tertiary institutions in Ghana. This should also mean that, wearing prescribed school uniforms, taking exeat, responding to school bells, weeding and cleaning compounds, among others, which pertain in the training colleges, should be abolished. These suggestions fit in a broader attributes of developing responsible citizens and professionals. We believe initial teacher training should be situated within a much broader framework of teacher education and continuous development to ensure Ghana recruits and retains teachers who are motivated, innovative and inspiring.

VIAM wishes to urge the Ghanaian public, especially the political parties to engage in broader stakeholder consultations in defining their manifestoes in the run up to the 2016 General Elections. We are willing to leverage on our broad array of network of experts to help drive such agenda.

Signed

Dr. Prince Armah

Executive Director

VIAM Africa Centre for Education and Social Policy