

Supportive. The university is keen on ensuring the students have a conducive environment to study. Lecturers have an interactive relationship with the students and when one misses a class, it is the lecturer's responsibility to follow up with them **writes Phionah Nassanga**

"I joined Aga Khan University as a student in August 2007 and studied for two and half years. I graduated in January 2010 and on 15th March I was enrolled as a full time staff," says Mary Namuguzi, a lecturer of community health nursing. Namuguzi is proud to have studied in Aga Khan University where she says she was identified during her time as a student, and was able to become part of the university staff after going through vigorous interviews.

Like Namuguzi, there are many men and women who have received life-time skills from the Aga Khan University, one of the nursing and midwifery institutions in Uganda. The university which started way back in 2001, was began with an aim of supporting and developing nurses and midwives in Uganda.

According to Joseph Mwizerwa the academic principal, the institution aims at supporting career advancement of nurses to higher levels of qualification. "Many enter nursing with a certificate. So we have a programme that upgrades them to diploma level but we also have nurses who enter at diploma level and upgrade to a degree level," Mwizerwa says.

"At Aga Khan University, for one to qualify as a student, they have to be a qualified nurse or midwife holding a registration certificate with a practicing license which shows they are professional nurses and midwives. We also require that one has practiced for a minimum of two years from their last pre-registration and double check whether one entered nursing with the correct entry requirements," he explains.

Learning environment

The university provides an interactive style of relationship between the students and teachers. The management takes the time to understand

their students social and work life so as to ensure they get their money's worth.

"At Aga Khan University we have what we call work study programme for our students. This kind of programme is favourable and supportive to all our students who work and study at the same time," he says. With this programme, the students study in batches, with each batch studying two days a week.

"We have two days of study for the particular courses, the first day is for theory and the second day is assigned for clinical practicals as one is expected to go and practice," he explains.

The principal notes that they have created what they call a teacher-students relationship, as many of their students are studying, working and have other family responsibilities. "We come up to support and monitor them. We follow on their performances and when a student misses any class it is the responsibility of that lecturer to call and find out why they did not attend."

The university also has what they call the mood site and all the students have access to it. Lecturers are expected to send notes to students through this site a week before they attend the lecture. This gives students a chance to do work on their own before they engage in any discussions with their teachers. They also offer partial scholarships to students who might not be able to fully pay for their tuition due to different financial challenges that may arise.

"This is a partial scholarship for needy students. However, there is a procedure we follow and one must express the need for it and should be able to share with us important and verifiable information about their financial status, for example their pay slip and related information of their earnings. We also look at other social

A university that focuses on students



Prof. Grace Edwards demonstrates the apparatus used in the laboratory when teaching students. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

family information which they would have submitted earlier. So, we look at that type of information and come up with a formula that allocates percentages to these students who have applied," Mwizerwa says.

Teaching staff

Caroline Namukwaya an academic co-coordinator says the university has a teaching staff of 15 members

who are well trained and equipped. "At Aga Khan University, students do not wait for lectures as the lecturer has to be in the lecture room an hour before students start arriving and we use a lot of interactive teaching to ensure that students do not dose off as some travel from as far as Gulu, Mbarara and by the time they get to class, they are tired," says Namukwaya. As the teaching skills

keep changing, lecturers are given a chance to engage in a number of trainings and workshops. "We will be having a workshop very soon which is about rethinking teaching and how you can redesign your teaching skills as a lecturer," Namukwaya explains. Her explanations and that of Mr Mwizerwa show a university that focuses on giving their students the best and continuously improving.