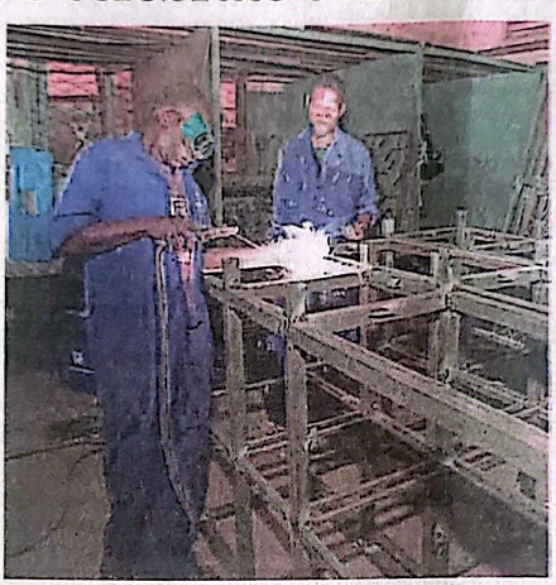
LETTER OF THE DAY

We must celebrate vocational excellence the same way we celebrate other exam scores



When the Ministry of Education and Sports, together with the Uganda National Examinations Board, released the 2025 Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) results last month, what followed was entirely predictable and revealing. Uganda's major newspapers dedicated multiple pages to the results. Faces of top performers filled the pages. Schools were ranked nationally and by district. Teachers were praised. Advertisements from primary and secondary schools competed for the attention of parents. There were three to four full days of national celebration.

Two weeks ago, the 2025 Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) results were released. And, predictably, in the days that followed, multiple pages of national and regional newspapers were awash with results. In a few weeks, the same will happen again when the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) results are released. This ritual has become normal. And to be clear, there is nothing wrong with celebrating academic excellence.

The problem is what we do not celebrate.

When vocational and technical education results are released, whether from the Uganda Vocational and Technical Examinations Board or other assessment bodies, our newspapers go quiet. At best, a half-page article appears, buried somewhere inside the paper. No headlines. No photographs of top performers. No rankings of institutions. No recognition of outstanding instructors. No advertisements from vocational schools proudly showcasing their graduates.

Just silence. It is a whisper in comparison to the loud celebration following primary and secondary leaving examinations. This is not a coincidence. It is a signal.

Uganda is, by structure, an informal economy. The majority of our young people will not walk into formal, salaried jobs. They will hustle, survive, and thrive by learning a skill and using it to create work for themselves as mechanics, electricians, builders, tailors, plumbers, welders, agribusiness operators, and technicians. Vocational education is not a second option in such an economy. It is the most relevant option. Yet our national attention tells a different story. We celebrate intelligence measured by exam aggregates, but we largely ignore intelligence expressed through hands, tools, and craft. We elevate those who can solve equations on paper, but we overlook those who can wire a building, fix an engine, or construct a home.

This imbalance matters. What we celebrate shapes what families value. What families value shapes what children pursue. And what children pursue shapes the future of our economy. When vocational excellence is hidden, young people internalise a dangerous message that working with your hands is something to be tolerated, not celebrated. That practical skill is inferior to academic theory. That dignity lies in certificates, not competence.

This must change. If Uganda is serious about transforming its economy, then vocational education excellence must be treated with the same national respect as academic education excellence.

Here are four concrete actions we can take.

First, the Ministry of Education and Sports should mandate equal media treatment of vocational education results. When vocational results are released, newspapers should be required to dedicate meaningful space, at least two to three pages, with headlines, analysis, and recognition of excellence, just as they do for PLE, UCE, and UACE.

Second, vocational institutions themselves must step forward. Too many remain invisible. They should actively advertise in newspapers during results season, showing parents and learners that high-quality vocational pathways exist and that they lead to real livelihoods.

Third, media houses must take responsibility. Newspapers shape national priorities. Giving vocational education half a page buried deep inside the paper is not neutral. It is editorial judgment. Editors should proactively dedicate space to vocational achievement as a matter of national interest.

Fourth, assessment bodies and training authorities must do more to engage the public. When vocational results are released, the best performers should be showcased. Their stories should be told. Employers should know who the star graduates are. Excellence must be made visible.

This is not about diminishing academic success. It is about broadening our definition of excellence. We are born intelligent in different ways. Some think best with numbers and words. Others think best with tools, materials, and systems. A healthy nation celebrates all forms of intelligence, especially those that build, repair, and sustain it. If we continue to celebrate only one kind of success, we will continue to push our young people toward pathways that do not match the realities of our economy. Uganda does not just need thinkers. It needs builders. And it is time we celebrated them accordingly.

James Ssekikubo Katumba,
Co-Founder and Managing Director of Wezesha Impact

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Besides sports, what else to do you do to earn a living?







