

THE UNIVERSITY BURSAR CONCEDED THAT SH2.8B IN DEBTS OWED HAVE NO SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

By Moses Walubiri

The Kyambogo University academic registrar, Dr Peter Okello, yesterday tested the patience of lawmakers sitting on the public accounts committee when, in his response to audit queries, seemed to lack remorse over the presence of 'ghosts' among students admitted to the public university.

Okello was part of Kyambogo University technocrats led by the university secretary, Charles Okello, who were at Parliament yesterday to proffer responses to audit queries raised by the Auditor General, John Muwanga, in his report for the financial year ending June last year.

In his report, the AG noted that 61 students had somehow been admitted without requisite qualifications and subsequently graduated without the responsible university department raising a red flag.

Asked by committee vice-chairperson, Gerald Karuhanga and MPs Fred Baseka and Peter Lokii as to why his department was running a public university like "a kiosk", Okello riled lawmakers with his response.

"There are some unscrupulous people who access our system and manage to join as students. If we are able to stop some of them, you ought to give us credit," Okello said.

Asked whether such 'ghost' students actually attend lectures and eventually sit exams, Okello answered in the affirmative.

However, the veteran administrator told lawmakers that the university is in the process of upgrading its system to only admit students holding cards whose biodata would be readable,

We have ghosts, says Kyambogo University



Charles Okello, Patrick Madaya, the former university secretary; Bainemigisha, the senior assistant bursar, appearing before MPs yesterday. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

upon swiping the card.

The import of Okello's submission is that flaws that can be exploited by unscrupulous individuals to eventually go through the university exist not only at admission stage, but also after admission through inefficient

management system.

The issue of ghosts (fictitious data) has over the years dogged a number of public institutions, ranging from schools and universities to government ministries, departments and agencies.

Quite often, the Government has ordered a cleanup of its payroll or arranged impromptu headcounts of pupils, students and teachers in public schools and universities — including Makerere University early this year.

In the pension sector alone, a report

released in March this year indicates that the Government is losing sh1.3b to ghost pensioners.

Like in the previous financial years, Muwanga's report on Kyambogo is replete with a slew of accountability queries — mainly relating to failure to adduce documents supporting expenditure of colossal sums.

One such accountability query is the sh4.6b outstanding receivables of which a paltry sh1.7b has supporting documents.

The university bursar, Everest Bainemigisha, conceded that sh2.8b in debts owed to the university have no supporting documents.

This in essence means that the university is demanding sh2.8b from unknown people, despite the 'windfall' being reflected in the university's books of account.

"The university has set up a committee to investigate this issue," Bainemigisha said, in response to questions from lawmakers.

According to the auditors attached to the public accounts committee, the import of documents 'missing' in this case, is that money was most likely collected from the debtors and salted away.

The missing documents, the auditors told lawmakers, is an attempt to muddle the trail and draw a veil over those responsible for swindling the money.

In the Ninth Parliament, Kyambogo University was at the centre of two investigations — one by Parliament's education committee and another by the Inspectorate of Government, over a litany of issues that were bedeviling the university.