

Govt directs business schools to stop setting own exams

By John Agaba

First, it was the teaching of vocational and technical certificate courses that was banned last year. Now, tertiary institutions, mainly those that offer business education, will not be allowed to set and mark own exams.

According to the new Ministry of Education and Sports guidelines, all post-O'level and A'level and advanced level programme examinations offered by tertiary institutions, will have to be set and assessed by recognised national examinations boards.

Universities that offer post-O'level certificate programmes, business vocational training institutions, and the mushrooming private institutes are some of those which will be affected by the directive.

The permanent secretary at the education ministry, Alex Kakooza, said the move would streamline post-ordinary and advanced level certificate programmes, which have in the past had "un-harmonised accreditation and assessment".

The policy will also standardise qualifications and awards in the Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) sub-sector, in accordance with the BTJET Act of 2008 to address the skills 'abnormality' in the country.

According to the guidelines, issued on November 13, all post-O'level business certificate programmes which allow vertical progression and can be equated to A'level education of Uganda shall take a minimum teaching duration not less than two years.

Accreditation of all post-O'level business certificate training

programmes shall be handled by the BTJET department of the education ministry.

The assessments will be a responsibility of the recognised national examinations boards: Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB), Uganda Allied Health Examinations Board (UAHEB) and the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examinations Board (UNMEB).

"The mandate of tertiary institutions as stated in the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 (as amended) notwithstanding, all diploma and certificate programmes in the scope of Section 9 of the BTJET Act 2008 shall be subject to national assessment by the line examinations boards to fully measure competencies, based on the principles of competence-based assessment," Kakooza's statement reads in part.

The development means that the national assessment boards will be the ones to set and mark both end of semester and end of year examinations.

The courses offered by technical colleges and specialised training institutions, which are due for national assessment under Section 9 of the BTJET Act include nursing and midwifery, allied health professional courses, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, engineering and electronics, meteorology, carpentry, art and design.

Others are music, dance and drama, business and entrepreneurship, hair dressing and beautifying, mining, catering, tourism and hospitality and professional sports.

"Technical colleges and specialised



Alex Kakooza

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ Officials from the education ministry argue that post-O'level courses should be taken for two years to be equated to A'level.

■ They say the curriculum and assessment, in addition to being centralised, should be competence-based to curb unemployment.

■ However, Patrick Behayo, the principal of the Uganda Co-operative College in Tororo, says much as a competence-based curriculum is welcome, it should not be rushed because it demands apparatus and learning materials, which will take time to be procured.

training institutions shall develop and carry out training of trainers' programmes. A person trained as a

trainer of trainers may apply to the council for accreditation as a trainer of trainers," the section states.

The guidelines say the two-year certificate programmes shall be effected starting with the 2018/2019 academic year, to allow adequate time for curriculum adjustment.

Onesmus Oyesigye, the UBTEB executive secretary, explained that all post-O'level certificate programmes would be accredited by the BTJET department and be nationally assessed, "irrespective of where they were offered".

Why centralised competence-based assessment?

Oyesigye said the one-year business programmes offered by some universities and other private tertiary institutions, which conduct internal examinations hampered UBTEB's efforts to promote competence-based national assessments, which it is meant to implement in all BTJET institutions.

Oyesigye said much as the country grapples with high levels of unemployment, 60% are unemployed due to lack of competence in their various fields of study.

He said learners assessed by UBTEB had attained competence levels of above 50% in all course units, easily understood concepts, which made them competitive in the job market.

Robert Odok Ooeng, the ministry's director for higher education and BTJET, explained that whereas the law required that certificate courses last two years, it was discovered that some universities and other tertiary institutions taught one-year courses.

"All post-O'level certificate courses

should take two years to be equated to A'level," Odok said.

More Ugandans have embraced vocational and technical education, with Government backing it as a priority for development and job creation.

A new UBTEB report shows that students sitting final exams in BTJET institutions countrywide increased by 181%, from 9,198 students in 2012 to 25,876 students last year.

There are more than 1,000 business training institutions which offer programmes leading to the award of certificates and diplomas in the country.

Amos Asul, the former principal at the National Meteorological Training School in Entebbe, welcomed the move by the ministry, saying "education, at every level, should be competence-based."

"The only way we are going to manage unemployment is through emphasis of a competence-based curriculum and assessments. It is better when these assessments are centralised," he said.

Patrick Behayo, the principal at the Uganda Co-operative College in Tororo, said the directive was a good move, but one which did not have to be rushed.

"For instance, the curriculum we have been implementing for certificate programmes lasts only one year. If we are to prepare courses for two years, it will require time," he said.

"It means that some things have to change. A competence-based curriculum and assessments will require the schools to have more apparatus and learning materials for practical lessons," he added.