

Students of Nakawa Vocational Institute in a building and construction class. Before joining any vocational institute, parents and students need to establish whether the school is registered and offers certified courses. FILE PHOTO

Identifying a genuine vocational school

BY GODFREY LUGAAJU
glugaaju@ug.nationmedia.com

Lately, many vocational institutions have sprung up and little is known by the public about which of these is ideal to attend.

This comes on the heels of reports that many vocational institutions are not only unknown by the Department of Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) but some are also offering courses not accredited by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and when students graduate, their qualifications are rejected by employers.

There are a number of key aspects one can base on to identify a credible tertiary institute or otherwise when it comes to looking out for the best and ensuring quality in the labour market.

According to Ms Lydia Asimwe, the head of the BTJET department at the National Curriculum Development Centre, absence of a curriculum to guide the teaching and learning of technical and vocational

training in the last 52 years could ideally explain the phenomenon.

It is now that they have formulated their own curriculum to fit the needs of the modern Ugandan population.

"Our programmes have been reviewed to meet the competence based education training standards and in the reviewed curriculum, we have included real life projects that students practice in the environment around for example building," she says. Ms Asimwe adds that they have also included compulsory industrial training as a requirement which is now on a yearly basis.

"We have modulated it in a way that if one completes a module, they should be able to perform that very taught because we are looking at competence basically," she says.

The notion of one dwelling on only technical knowledge is highly disregarded as the new curriculum encourages the gaining of computer skills, entrepreneurship and language to complement the technical bit.

"We have included an implementation programme in our curriculum, whereby we follow up the students who go for industrial training and we give a guide line to the supervisors to monitor the progress and proper implementation of what the student is learning," she says.

Mr Kambaho Narasi, the public relations officer of the Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB), says with establishment of the exams body, students and parent can tell the legitimacy of the institution by checking whether it offers programmes approved by the National Curriculum Development Centre and accredited by the National Council for Higher Education.

"It should have a certificate of operation from the Ministry of Education, a charter from the National Council for Higher Education and a letter showing its accredited in the office," he says. However, Mr Joseph Kikomeko, the deputy director qualification standards in the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), says with the

liberalisation of the vocational training institutions sector, it is very hard to establish the credible institution.

"With the many private players in the industry of vocational training institutions which were allowed by the government to operate, it is the horn ace of the parents to decide on which one to take their children basing on the affordability and what the institution offers," he says.

Formalisation and accreditation

Mr Patrick Byakatonda the acting assistant commissioner, business education, says for a vocational Institution to be formal, it has to be licenced and registered under the Education Act, 2008.

"Upon attaining clearance from the district inspector of schools and approved to be meeting all the requirements like staffing (competent and qualified personnel), having workshops and equipment among others, then it is given a licence which is valid for two years," he says.

Mr Byakatonda adds that this certificate is like a probation ap-

pointment and the institution is later given a registration certificate by the National Council for Higher Education.

The process

UBTEB is mandated to accredit Business, technical and specialised training institutions as examinations centres. In line with this, the Board puts in place rules and guidelines on the conduct of the examinations which also includes the guidelines on accreditation of institutions.

After supervision and the needs of an institution are found in place, a training institution obtains an application form for accreditation and registration from the Board at a non-refundable fee determined by the Board. Filled copies of the application form are returned to the Board for further verification within a period of two weeks. The Board upon inspection and satisfaction that the training institution complies with the accreditation requirements, issues a Certificate of Accreditation as proof of status as an examination center.

The centre prepares a report on maintenance of the standards for accreditation which the Board reviews annually to ensure that the minimum standards are maintained.

The Board reserves the right to suspend and/or withdraw an examination center if it ceases to satisfy the accreditation requirements, regulations and ethical standards of an accredited examination centre.