

Makerere to introduce pre-entry exams for medics

By Gloria Nakajubi

Not everyone who comes in after scoring high point at A'level turns out a star student at the medical school. Some of them have retakes," said Prof. Moses Kamyia, the dean of Makerere University Medical School, has said.

As a result, Uganda's oldest and largest medical school is in advanced stages of introducing pre-entry exams for those intending to pursue bachelor of medicine and surgery.

In an interview with *New Vision*, the dean explained that the intention is to admit students who are 'called to be doctors'. "We believe that being a doctor is a calling and this cannot be entirely determined by one's academic performance as the case is right now," he said.

The pre-entry exam as discussed by the dean will not necessarily increase the number of students joining the school, but rather enhance diversity and equity.

Currently, he said, the school has become a reserve of the students from urban schools who can score the points required at entry.

"We don't want students who are here to do their parents' choice programmes. Our assessment tools will be able to sieve out who is passionate and able to successfully accomplish the course."

Out of the hundreds that apply for admission, the school can admit only 150 students every year.

At the diploma level, last year saw just four admitted out of the 200 applications received.

The proposal currently

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ T school can admit only 150 students every year. At the diploma level, last year saw just four admitted out of the 200.

awaits consent from the university council, the institution's topmost decision making organ.

Kamyia further explained that there is still an eligibility criterion for who will sit the exams.

Some critics have argued that pre-entry exams is just but another avenues academic institutions have started to raise revenue, with minimal contribution to improving academic standards.

For one to sit for pre-entry exams at Makerere Law School and LDC, they have to pay an application fee currently at sh80,000. Last year, a total of 1,812 registered for the exam, generating sh144.96m. Of these, 1,799 actually sat for the exams and only 840 passed.

Immaculate Owomugisa, lawyer and human rights advocate

said pre-entry is not the solution to the quality of doctors we have. Actually, we have a lot of questionable lawyers out there despite pre-entry exams at LDC. My view is the emphasis government is putting on sciences over the arts is what is pushing people in a field they are not even interested in. It all comes back to how we groom learners. You can't expect competent people at medical school when there

are no science laboratories at most secondary schools.

Dr Ekwaro Obuku, president of Uganda Medical Association said:

"The move is an important step in the right direction. We are seeing medical doctors lacking in communication and other proficiency."

"The A' level marks do not reflect their abilities consequently leading to deficiency in medical skills and knowledge. We actually propose universal staged exams after pre-clinicals in year two and clinicals in medical schools," he adds.

What they say

Dr Aaron Nahabwe, the spokesperson of the National Interns Executive Committee said: "My prayer is that it is made universal for all medical

schools, including private ones. I studied with people who joined with 24 points but they were struggling," he notes.

I kept wondering how they got the grades and can't handle medical school. The other benefit with this is that government can now have numbers planned for at entry, other than introducing pre-internship exams as a way of cutting numbers," he adds.

Cecilia Nokrach, a social scientist, says the exam is a good move however it should be able to address the regional imbalances. "Most of the doctors, since they are from the urban areas, find it hard to work upcountry," she explains.

The exam, for me, is a sieve and will bring those students who have dreamt of being doctors all their lives."