

Universities likely to raise entry points

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The improved performance in last year's Advanced Level examinations is likely to cause stiff competition in choosing courses at university.

An analysis by *Daily Monitor* of admission trends to public universities indicate a high likelihood of even stiffer cutoffs this year compared to the previous year.

Of significance is the fact that more students according to the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) performed better than the 2014 lot. Secondly, more girls proportionately performed better than boys and given the 1.5 extra points bonus affirmative action awarded, boys are likely to be out competed in choice of courses like law, one of the few that still attract government sponsorship.

Fewer students pursued science courses and even fewer passed them living the greatest competition to the Arts courses, which also had the majority students.

Like it has been over the last four years, the competition is likely to be stiffer for science courses such as Medicine, Engineering, Petroleum Geoscience and Production, Health Management, Pharmacy and Population Studies. For instance, a student needed 52.7 points to pursue a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery at Makerere University, up from 49.4 points in 2014, while at Gulu University, the same course required one to have 47.8 points.

No cut-off for Law

However, there will be no cut-off mark for law as it has been in the last five years as new entrants will be subjected to pre-entry exams in order to gain admission to pursue the course.

At Makerere University, Business Administration, Petroleum Geoscience and Production, Industrial and Organisational Psychology, Pharmacy and Population Studies, were the most competitive courses last year, as was the case in 2014.

At Kyambogo University, Guidance and Counselling, Building and Civil Engineering and Economics and Statistics were among the top courses. At Makerere University, Pharmacy had the highest cut-off point of 52.9, followed by Civil Engineering, Arts in Development Studies, Electrical Engineering and Medicine.

Last year, it was Development Studies, which had the highest cut-off point (52.8).

According to the results released yesterday, 97.8 per cent of the candidates passed and qualify for the award of the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education, compared to 97.4 per cent in 2014. Out of the 99,849 candidates who sat the examinations, 56,656 (56.7 per cent) qualify to join university. This is a small number compared to 64,132 (59.8 per cent) who qualified to join university in the previous year. However, it should be noted that the number of candidates in 2015 reduced to 99,849 from 107,297 in 2014, indicating a difference of 7448 candidates. But if other tertiary institutions like some private universities accept to admit candidates with 1 pass and two subsidiary passes, the number of those joining higher institutions of learning might reach 82,826.

Hard pressed for space public universities will be keen to keep numbers low. Makerere, the biggest university, has for years been pursuing a policy of gradual reduction in the number of students it admits in a bid to match learners with facilities, at the same time government has skewed its offer of university scholarships towards sciences at the expense of Arts courses at a ratio of 75:25, meaning that competition for Arts courses whose subjects were better done will be very stiff.

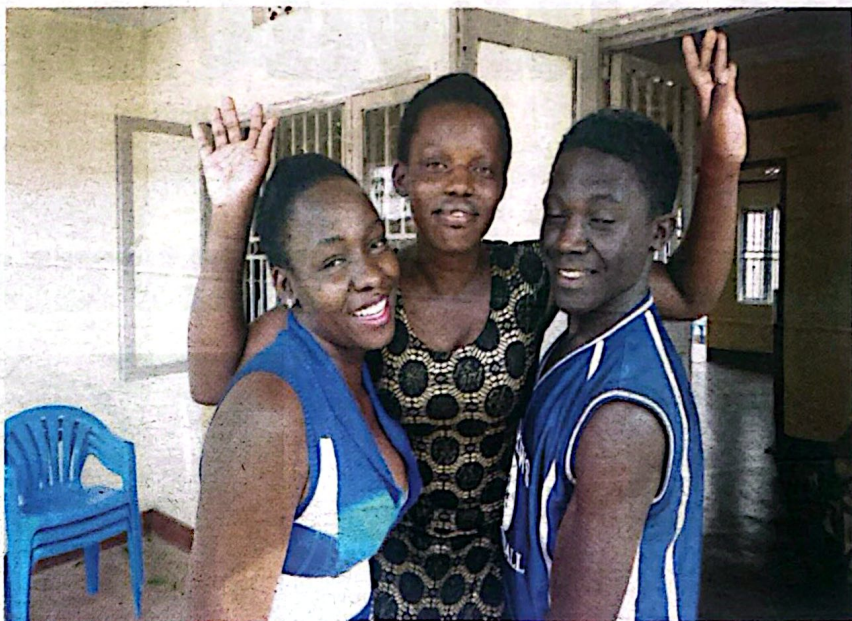
THE DIFFERENCE

Science subjects at university are weighted differently from humanities/arts subjects. The situation is further complicated by the fact that some subjects are divided into three papers and others two.

Candidates who obtained an overall Grade of 7.9.Y or Z in their Senior Four results don't qualify for university admission. The current guidelines favour only those who passed at least five subjects at Ordinary Level (Senior Four) without a Grade 9.

The cutoff points for admission into a particular programme are determined by the lowest score of the last person accepted into that programme. There is an affirmative action of an additional 1.5 points to female students, though it has received criticism of recent. People with disabilities, talented athletes, and the children of university staff are also beneficiaries.

Last year, overall, admission points for more than 80 per cent science courses went up, according to the Joint Admissions Board records. However, starting this year, admissions will be handled by a special committee which will be appointed by the ministry fol-



Former Seeta High School- Mukono student Ruth Elizabeth Ajore, the daughter of Eastern Region Youth MP Peter Ogwang, celebrates with her family members after scoring 20 points. PHOTO BY JOSEPH EIGU ONYANGO

lowing Court declaring PUJAB an illegal entity.

This is going to be the third batch to join university since government changed the grading system in 2012. The grading at university changed following the introduction of two other subjects at Advanced Level; Sub-Math and Computer Studies.

This means students who pursue science combinations or combinations having Economics, are required to add Sub-Math as a subsidiary, while those doing Arts must add Computer Studies. However, those who do Mathematics are exempted from Sub-Math.

Adding points:

The O'level weight of a candidate for any programme in the university is obtained by multiplying the numbers of Distinctions /Credits/Passes, by the relevant weights and adding up for the Distinctions, Credits and passes actually got by the candidate. The A' level weight, for a given programme, of a candidate is obtained by multiplying each subject grade point by the relevant weighting factor and adding up for all the subjects taken and passed.

The combined weight of a candidate for a given programme is obtained by adding the O' level weight obtained to the A' level weight. The best candidate for each academic programme is the one with the highest combined weight.

Candidate are selected on merit from those who apply for a programme as their first choice plus those who apply for the programme as 2nd, 3rd, 4th choice if they have not been admitted to the programmes of their earlier choices. Good enough, all choices are

considered.

Weighting criteria

A computerised weighting system is used. The points depend on the number of applicants per course and the capacity of the faculties available in a given university.

Under the weighting criteria which started working three years ago, all subjects pursued at Senior Six are grouped into three categories; essential which has a weight of 3, relevant (2) and desirable (1).

For a given candidate, not more than three subjects taken at principal level carry a weight of three, two or one. Not more than two principal subjects are designated as essential.

A pass with a Distinction or Credit in a subject taken at subsidiary level such as General Paper, Sub-Maths or Computer Studies, carry one point. A subsidiary pass ranges from grades 1-6. For example, if the cut-off points for Medicine are 52 and a candidate scored AAAC in Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Sub-Maths and a distinction in General Paper. At A-Level, A carries six points, B five, C-four, D-three, E-two, O-one and F-O points.

Assuming the first two subjects are essential for Medicine, the third relevant and the fourth desirable, his weight would be calculated as follows:

Chemistry: A (6X3) =18
Biology: A (6X3) =18

Physics: A (6X2) =12
Sub-Maths C (4X1) =4

General Paper: 1

Total: 52

Note: O-Level marks also account for university entry. A distinction (1 & 2) is weighed at 0.3, while credits (3 to 6)

are rated at 0.2. Female students are also added 1.5 points bonus.

Makerere is expected to release the list of government-sponsored students in two months' time. Thereafter, the university will advertise courses for the private programme.

Currently, government sponsors 4,000 students in public universities. Of these, 3,000 are selected on academic merit, with 75 per cent of the places going to those admitted to science courses and 25 per cent reserved for humanities or Arts courses.

In addition, 40 slots go to talented sports students, 64 to persons with disabilities, while districts take 896 under the district quota system.

Due to the limited vacancies available in the seven public universities, a large number of students who passed will have to try their luck in about 30 private universities countrywide.

Currently, a total of 1,401 students are benefiting from the University Loan Scheme and another 2000 beneficiaries are expected to be added this year. All admissions usually depend on the students' ability to meet the entry points set by the respective universities.

This implies that the planned number may slightly drop or increase in the respective public universities.

Public universities usually admit about 80,000 students and one needs two principal passes to gain admission. Academic year for universities starts in August and since exams have been released early this year, parents will have five months to look for placements for children in their preferred institutions as well as getting tuition fees unlike in the past where they had only three months.