

Closed Busoga varsity admitting students

Uncertainty. Despite being closed, the university is still operational, as the administration is optimistic that the fate of the continuing students will be solved

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KAMPALA. A mystery and darkness hangs over the future of graduates of Busoga University. They have been awarded degrees whose academic worth is unknown. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has no clue either.

The university was closed by NCHE in December last year after it was discovered it had awarded degrees to more than 1,000 students, majority of whom were from South Sudan after a two-month study in 2016.

Later, President Museveni announced that the government would take over the institution and named a committee to oversee the process.

The takeover has not yet taken place and NCHE says the university remains closed. However, the university has continued to run academic programmes and admit new students.

The university's spokesperson, Mr Andrew Balondemu, confirmed that the closure has not affected their operations.

"The university is operating normally. Even at the time of closure, there was a court injunction. For us, it has been business as usual. We have even started examinations for continuing students. We are admitting new students and this is done throughout the year," Mr Balondemu told *Daily Monitor* last month.

Following these revelations, this newspaper visited the university campus in Iganga District to verify Mr Balondemu's claims.

On April 26, our reporter travelled from Kampala to the university under the guise of seeking admission of a relative for an academic course.

Uncover investigation

The reporter arrived at the campus at 3:15pm. There was not much activity as students were scattered over the yard in group discussions.

At the reception sat a lady ready to take any inquiries. *Daily Monitor* sought to see the academic registrar, but the lady demanded to know the reason. She offered the information regarding admissions.

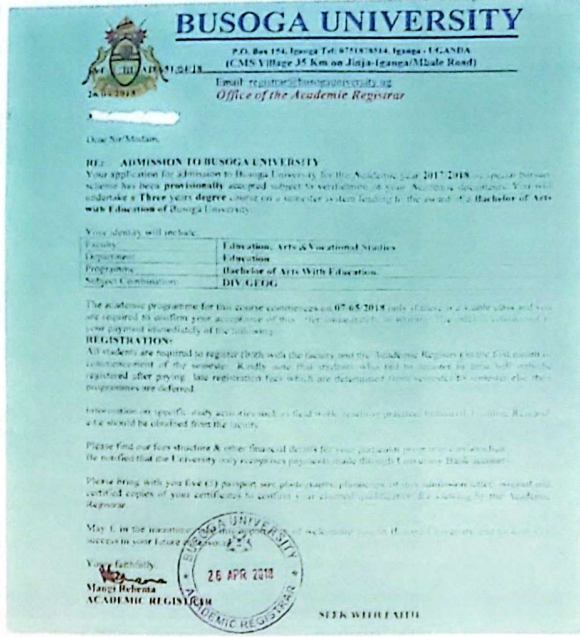
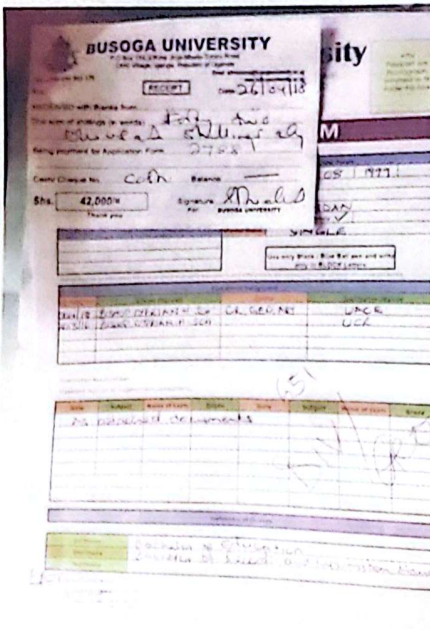
The reporter insisted on seeing the academic registrar for further guidance on which appropriate course but upon perusal of the results slip, the lady recommended Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Records and Information Management.

Realising the futility of further asking, *Daily Monitor* settled for her choices. She demanded a payment of Shs42,000 as application fees before seeing the academic registrar.

The fee was promptly paid and she offered guidance in filling the application form. Upon completion of the process, the reporter was led to academic registrar's office.

The path leads through lecture rooms. Students were sitting their examinations.

The reporter had attached only the Level results slip without the O-level or Primary 7 certificates, which are requirements for admission to



Documents. Left is a receipt given to our reporter for application fees while right is the admission letter issued upon paying the fees. PHOTO BY PATIENCE AHIMBISIBWE

university. The academic registrar's secretary asked for the missing certificates but our reporter promised to bring them later when the student reported for studies.

At this moment, the reporter was ushered into the office of academic registrar, Ms Rehema Mangi.

Ms Mangi said the admission had been granted and offered an email address where the lacking academic documents would be posted.

She said they needed the documents urgently so that the administration is prepared by the time government team visited the university for the takeover assessment.

In 10 minutes, the admission letter was ready, bearing Bachelor of Arts in Education with Geography and Divinity.

"Your application for admission to Busoga University for the academic year 2017/2018 on special bursary scheme has been provisionally accepted... You will undertake a three years degree course... leading to the award of a Bachelor of Arts with Education. The academic programme for this course commences on May 07, 2018..." the admission letter reads in part.

It does not explain what kind of bursary it is. Besides, the letter is dated April 26, 2018, but shows the admission is for last academic year 2017/2018 instead of 2018/2019. The reporting date is today.

The admission letter provides a fees structure where each undergraduate student is required to pay Shs600,000 and Shs262,000 functional fees.

Law students pay an additional Shs200,000 annually to attend court sessions.

Students studying Information Technology, Health Sciences, Mass Communication and Agriculture pay an extra Shs150,000 per semester as "collaboration" fees.

However, the State Minister for Higher Education, Mr Chrysostom Muyingo, who chairs the takeover

committee, expressed surprise that the university is operational.

Mr Muyingo said as far as government is aware, the university is officially closed.

Asked whether he was aware the university is admitting new students or when the government will open it, Mr Muyingo responded: "We are working to ensure the university operates as soon as possible. But for opening, it will be a decision for the Council (NCHE)."

At the university campus last week, Mr Balondemu said they were waiting for the government team to verify the information on ground.

NCHE position

But Prof Opuda has asked the university administration to stop duping the public and admitting students or continuing to teach undergraduates who had been admitted by the time of closure.

"We are just starting to work on Busoga University to become a public university. The university is not supposed to be working now. They must stop admission and teaching continuing students because they do not have what it takes to run a university. What they are doing is illegal," he said.

COURT ORDER

Justice Solomy Balungi Bossa of the Constitutional Court issued an order on January 31, two months after the closure, restraining NCHE from revoking Busoga University's licence. The court further halted NCHE's decision to stop the university from admitting new students until its case challenging the closure had been disposed of. The university was founded in 1999 and is affiliated to Busoga Diocese under the Church of Uganda.



“ Busoga University is closed. That is what I know as government. Preparatory work has started to make it a public university. The committee is going to make actionable recommendations for implementation.” CHRYSOSTOM MUYINGO, STATE MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

“ The university is operating normally. Even at the time of closure, there was a court injunction. For us, it has been business as usual. We have even started examinations for continuing students. We are admitting new students and this is done throughout the year.” ANDREW BALONDEMU, UNIVERSITY SPOKESPERSON

government. It is a long process," Prof Opuda said.

His deputy, Dr Alex Kagame, said NCHE set up a committee to oversee the transfer of the continuing students to recognised universities but the university administration is undermining the process.

"There is a committee which was instituted to do the placement, but if the institution managers are not cooperating, what can we do? The list and contacts of students must be given by the university which they have not done. How do you deal with law offenders? Don't you know how this country operates? These institutions usually run to court and nothing else we can do," Dr Kagame said.

"Busoga University is closed by law. If they break the law, NCHE does not have a police force. We made public announcements through the media and we wrote to them. There is no authority we did not reach out to. All state organs are aware. Those students sitting examinations; don't they know the university was closed? Do they lack information? Eventually, the law will catch up with them," he added.

Some students are aware the university is operating illegally. One of the students *Daily Monitor* talked to at the campus warned this reporter against seeking admission because its status cannot be guaranteed.

He said before the examinations started on April 23, the students threatened to strike for lack of lectures but the university called police who camped at the campus for a week.

"We hear the university was closed, but they said we continue studying as they would sort out the issues. But we have not studied. We wanted the university to refund our money but police came and we started exams I would not advise anyone to bring their children here because we don't know its future," the student, only identified as Edward, said.