



Editorial

## Hiking public varsities' tuition not solution enough

Government may in future increase tuition fees in public universities, following the numerous studies done by the National Council for Higher Education, Office of the Auditor General and now the Omaswa Report.

The unit cost of education at Makerere University is low compared to some of the public universities in the country. The cost of living has also gone up over the years. The Omaswa Report, yet to be discussed by cabinet, now recommends that private students pay an additional sh2.29m on top of their usual average unit cost of sh2.7m annually. This will bring each student's annual unit cost at Makerere University to sh4.98m.

The last time public universities increased tuition fees was in 2009, several years after the previous increment in 1991, when public universities increased their fees by 40%.

Several students have been struggling to pay at the cur-

rent unit cost, which is just half of what is being proposed. This means that the increment will just complicate the issue, much as it will offer public universities more funding options.

But, this will not solve the problem of public universities' funding. It is important that universities get into serious business ventures. This can be done through a deliberate investment plan by each of the five public universities.

The Government should have given grants to each university based on an agreed formula and let the Auditor General track its use as it does all tax payers' money.

It is important that Government steps up its funding to public universities, as a way to solve their funding woes.

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# Change of vice-chancellors cannot save public universities

By Prof. A.B Kasozi

There is a false belief that a mere change of an individual vice-chancellor or manager of a public university can resolve the institution's management problems.

While a good manager can resolve a few administrative problems for a given time, in the long run, an individual cannot change an institution with structural problems. This has been shown by the failure of attempts to bring calm at Kyambogo University in the last few years, where we moved from one vice-chancellor to another without resolving the structural problems of the institution.

Some of these issues below determine how a public university will survive the tempests it faces.

### Lack of institutional autonomy

One of the causes of management problems in public universities is that the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2003, does not give public universities the institutional autonomy they need to manage their affairs freely.

This interference is embedded in the UTIO Act, 2001, as amended in 2003, 2006. While the 2001 Act freed public universities in a number of areas, there are many parts of this Act that were not changed from the spirit of the dictatorial 1970 Makerere Act. As a result, the Government can micro-manage public universities more than is good for the delivery of quality education. A vice-chancellor of a public university answers to his Council, to Parliament, the Ministry of Education and to the Ministry of Finance. He has many masters, who are all difficult to please.

### Linkage of the finances to the state

To be able to manage its affairs, the Council must have complete autonomy over its funds. There are a number of areas where public universities do not have the freedom to manage their finances. First, Section 62(3) forbids public universities to spend any money unless the expenditure has been approved by Parliament. Thus, although under section 41c, the University Council has powers to "fix scales of fees and boarding charges"; Makerere Council's attempts to increase fees in 2004/2005 were halted by the Government.

Furthermore, while public universities spend a lot on each student, Government does not ensure that universities receive from each student

## Public service administrative behaviour that is not fit for universities still operates in Uganda's public universities

### The Law

Under sections 31 - 37 of the Act, the vice-chancellor and other top officials of a public university are virtually elected by their peers, a system which has tended to politicise what is otherwise an academic process

the real unit cost of training as per the studies of unit costs by the Auditor General and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

Secondly, Section 59(5) of the Act does not give public universities the right to invest any of their funds without approval of the minister. This section should also be eliminated and Council given full powers to invest its money like private universities do.

The Government treasury can ask public universities to remit monies collected at source by the institutions using section 44(4) of the Public Finance and Accountability Regulations. This section should not apply to all education institutions and agencies.

Lastly, public service administrative behaviour that is not fit for universities still operates in Uganda's public universities. For example, the single spine salary structures, the age limit requirements and the "permanent and pensionable" terms of service do not belong to modern universities.

### Governance

Section 6A of the Act where the "Minister may



Kyambogo University welcoming Prof. Isaiah Ndiege (in hat) after he was reinstated by court. However, the university's problems still prevail

issue directives of a policy nature to all institutions of higher education, whether public or private, and the institutions shall give effect to those directives", is a dictatorial section that frightens vice chancellors. With enlightened leaders, this section might not be abused. But it can, however, be misused by bad leaders. Some of us who saw former president Idi Amin crown himself with a terminal academic degree and dismiss a vice-chancellor in front of the public that included students, this section makes us uneasy. It should be taken out of the Act as it can bring so many unwanted consequences. This section is likely to be applied more in public than private universities.

### Composition of the university council

The structures of Councils of public universities create a number of management problems. Firstly the composition of public universities' councils as set in Section 38 (1) of the Act disempowers management. It makes the composition of council in such a way that students and staff have too much control. If the Council is the employer of staff, they should not control it.



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Staff and students can never vote for what they perceive to be against their interests, though it might be serving the public good. The 2012 expulsion by Council of the vice-chancellor of Kyambogo before all the necessary reports were out should be a lesson for us to learn from.

Secondly the current councils of public universities are too big. Council should be reduced to 13 people: seven government representatives, one student representative, one staff representative, one alumni and the rest selected to represent various social constituencies.

### Confusion at the top

There is a legal problem that has engulfed the top levels of management in public universities. The law is not very clear on the powers, particularly financial powers of the vice-chancellor, the deputy vice-chancellor, finance and administration, the university secretary and the bursar. Also, the academic powers of the deputy vice-chancellor and academic registrar are blurred.

The major structural problem in the top governance of public universities lies in the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001 (the Act) where the vice-chancellor and his deputies are not the accounting officers or chief academic officers. Instead, junior officers like the university secretary and the academic registrar "say the last word" on financial and academic matters. Selection of the vice-chancellors

The system of choosing a vice-chancellor of a public university generates intrigue and political conflicts. While at NCHE, I avoided intervening in the selection processes of vice-chancellors because NCHE has no direct role in doing so, unless conflict erupts in the exercise. Under sections 31 - 37 of the Act, the vice-chancellor and other top officials of a public university are elected by their peers, a system which has tended to politicise what is otherwise an academic process.

However, much as this tends to be a problem for now, the situation before the enactment of the 2001 Act had worse problems, which included the choice of the vice-chancellor depending entirely on political as opposed to academic considerations. This created intrigue amongst academics seeking to get the jobs.

The idea of a highly professional search committee working with the senate and the university council as suggested by the White Paper is probably the most.