



## University Guide: Giving you the right career direction

On Friday, we will come out again with a fresher, detailed, informative and well-researched guide on higher education in the region.

This year's *University Guide* is not just about the appearance. It is more about being uniquely informative and offering authoritatively professional and engaging stories, built on community needs. We have planned well, for a number of months and we must get it right.

Every parent, student, school and all people who want to be informed, this guide is a must read. You want to know about accredited courses, tuition in universities, scholarships or best ways to get accommodation while at campus? Just read this year's guide. But more so, we have tips on how to easily get admitted in public universities on Government and private.

Most students nowadays fail to get admitted in universities or other higher institutions; not because they did not

perform well, but because they never got the required career guidance.

Times are changing so fast. There have been changes in the admission guidelines in universities, a reason students need to get abreast with the new changes. More so, the economy and opportunities keep changing; but most school career masters are not aware of these issues. Students need to make career decisions, on the basis of well researched information.

Getting a copy of this *University Guide* will offer you a unique access to information. We are Uganda's leading daily, and we take that responsibility seriously. It is the same reason why we have to take the lead in reporting on education and career issues.

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# Rush for PhDs: Are we churning out intellectuals or hangmen?

## Countries need PhD holders to create the knowledge needed for development

By Prof. A. B. Kasozi

**N**ATIONS need a core of highly educated people. People who can understand cutting edge information create original knowledge based on evidence, research and produce various physical and intellectual products. They should be able to participate in world knowledge by training the next generation of intellectual leaders. The majority of these people hold terminal degrees called doctors of philosophy (PhDs). These degrees are given to people who have contributed original intellectual products to known knowledge.

As Damtew Teferra has written, "building PhD programmes is not simply to encourage intellectual curiosity, but to address a critical aspect of national development". Countries need PhD holders, first to create the knowledge needed for development. Secondly to resolve daily social and scientific problems and, lastly, to teach the next generation of workers and thinkers. PhD holders are needed in universities, polytechnics, industry and agriculture to teach and prepare engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, agricultural workers, economists, teachers, various technicians, mass media communicators and a host of other skilled workers. Due to this urgent need, a number of African countries have a set target of the number and category of PhD graduates they want to produce in the next 10 or so years. Nigeria hopes to produce 3,500, Ghana 1,500 and Ethiopia 5,000. South Africa produces some 1,700 in a PhD track period, but has ambitions of raising the number to 5,000. In Uganda, PhD holders in 2011

**PhD**  
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were only 914 (15%) out of a staff of 6,174 in Uganda's university sub-sector in 2011. This figure was far below the 60% required by National Council for Higher Education standard capacity indicators. The country needs to raise its PhD holders substantially.

### Problem of PhD graduates

However, we must not rush to create PhD



PhD graduates must be trained in disciplines key to national development

holders. Quality must be the catchword for their production. If PhD graduates are to perform the functions society expects them to do, they must be well-trained in disciplines key to national development.

As trainers of the next generation of skilled personnel and as people entrusted to think for society, poorly trained PhD graduates can kill the whole society. They can become our hangmen unless well-trained. A number of problems confront any good person wishing to train good PhD graduates. Firstly, there are many people and institutions that, when they realise the urgent need for these graduates, prefer to take shortcuts and produce unqualified graduates.

Secondly, upright nationalists who wish to produce qualified PhD holders are confronted with for-profit forces that want to make money out of this delicate training. Rather than fight such strong forces, they give up and society suffers.

Thirdly, vice-chancellors who want to do a good job of training PhD graduates find that university and staff capacity are lacking. Those who already have these degrees best teach PhD holders. But as we realised above,

these are very few in our university sub-sector. Public universities in Uganda are not supported in this effort as funding for graduate programmes was eliminated in the 1990s. Whatever little of it that was left, was tied to vacancies in the civil service!

By abdicating from funding graduate programmes, Uganda gave a gradual poisonous pill to all our universities. Universities could not produce future academics and highly skilled personnel.

Private universities do not have the capacity to produce the many graduates they tell us they can. A look at the HiCi citations for the period 2005 to 2010 shows almost no scholar from any of Uganda's private university is contributing to human knowledge. The number of PhDs in those universities, the facilities in those institutions and their training traditions do not qualify them to produce many qualitative PhD graduates. Further, there are very many foreign rogue and fly-by-the-night institutions that give dubious PhD degrees.

Within some public universities that have some capacity, there are a host of problems that hinder good PhD graduate productions

including in-breeding (i.e. instructors and students who get all their degrees from one institution), long completion periods, lack of facilities and infrastructure as well as bias on the part of supervisors.

Lastly, public universities exclude the very people who have the knowledge to create the next generation of academics. Professors mature in the age period from 50 to 75. By adopting the civil service age limit of 60/65 age requirements, public universities were made to supersede intellect as the major requirement for staying at public universities. The results have been elimination of seasoned academics from universities, loss of mentoring and production of the next generation of academics. In a number of countries, able academics can work until they are 80 years.

### Way forward

The NCHE and universities should hold a meeting to determine the PhD requirements for this nation. In addition, the traditional method of producing PhD candidates by requiring only a thesis is no longer acceptable as many candidates plagiarise their way through. The PhD by coursework, annual and comprehensive examinations is by far the best method in this global age.

The latter method reduces plagiarism because the tutors interact with the candidate and know what the candidate can produce. In this light, I salute Mahmood Mamdani for the PhD programme that he is running at the Makerere Institute of Social Research. The students who will go through his programme will never regret their experience.

The Government must hurry to fund postgraduate programme if the more than 30 universities we have are to be staffed and the quarter of a million tertiary students are to be taught. The situation is dire. Worse still, Africa produces less than 0.7% of world knowledge.

If we want to create locally appropriate knowledge to resolve local problems, we must create the people to produce that knowledge. A large reservoir of well-trained PhD graduates in the needed disciplines will go a long way in resolving this problem.

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