

By Martin Kitubi

Arts students to enrol for science degrees

Tertiary education has been made easy. Now arts students can enroll for science courses at universities under the new Higher Education Certificate (HEC) programme.

The certificate programme was launched yesterday by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) at their home in Kyambogo. Students can enroll for the one-year certificate programme after Senior Six.

It was designed by NCHE in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) and the MasterCard Foundation.

Under the programme, students will be able to cross from sciences to arts courses or vice versa.

According to the HEC programme manual, this is for purposes of admission into undergraduate programmes at universities and other tertiary institutions.

For instance, students who are currently doing the History, Economics and Geography (HEG) subject combination at A' level can enrol for the HEC programme in physical sciences.

After one year, the arts student would qualify for an undergraduate course, such as bachelor of science in electrical engineering at any university.

Currently, students undertaking the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) are specialised as either science or arts students.

However, the programme manual says this early specialisation dictates the university programmes that students are to pursue, with almost no flexibility to cross from arts programmes to science courses.

The NCHE noted that a number of able and willing students are not privileged to offer sciences at upper secondary due to restrictions at choice secondary schools.

"Given the level of academic maturity and the exposure to both arts and sciences, such candidates may be better placed for undergraduate university programmes than those who just specialised at the secondary school level," the manual reads.



Prof. Mary Okwakol

Prof. Mary Okwakol, the executive director of NCHE, said the HEC programme is one of the avenues through which enrolment in higher education will be increased, especially in science courses.

She added that the programme will mainly target female students who would have wished to enrol for science programmes at university, but did not get the required points.

Okwakol said higher education

should neither be restrictive nor just about mass education.

"We want the higher education system to be flexible, where someone can enrol for arts or sciences," she said.

Martha Muhwezi, the executive director at FAWE Africa, said: "We are hopeful that HEC will increase university enrolment in science courses, especially for female students."

Enrollment

According to NCHE statistics, the demand for higher education has tremendously increased due to the liberalisation of education, degree syndrome and increase in population.

Currently, NCHE says enrolment in higher education institutions has increased from under 10,000 in 1986 to over 259,000 students.

Despite this numerical growth, Okwakol says the gross enrolment ratio remains

relatively low, at just 6.8% compared to 9% in East Africa, 15% in Africa and 25% globally.

Need for HEC

According to NCHE, the HEC programme is also intended for holders of UACE or equivalent qualification, who may not have attained sufficient grades to enrol for diploma or degree programmes in Uganda.

Under the arrangement, for instance, a student who did not get the principal passes required for bachelor of medicine would enrol for a HEC in biological sciences for a year. Thereafter, the student would then enroll for an undergraduate programme in medicine at university.

The HEC is also intended to serve as a foundational programme for students whose foreign secondary school qualifications are not considered equivalent to UACE, but permit admission into higher education

Prof. Paul Waako, the vice-chancellor of Busitema University, said: "The programme is good. It will help students who could have failed to get the extra principal pass to join university."

Dr Mary Mutyaba Wanda, the academic registrar of Ndejje University, backed the proposal, saying a number of science students fail to make it to university because of lack of laboratories.

EDUCATIONISTS RESPOND

in the foreign country.

The programme will also provide a linkage between vocational qualifications and higher education qualifications, as well as university.

For instance, although an enrolled nursing certificate is equivalent to the UACE, currently, holders of the former can only join a degree programme after two-and-a-half years of intermediate diploma. The HEC will help such people to upgrade.