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**T**he management of Makerere University has blamed the low number of students graduating in its forthcoming 76th graduation ceremony on the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The university is set to graduate 8,432 students across various academic levels and disciplines from February 24 to 27. However, this is a sharp decline from the 13,658 students who graduated during the 75th graduation ceremony.

This has sparked public concern and speculation about declining enrolment and academic output at the oldest public university in the country.

While addressing journalists on Wednesday, the Makerere University Vice Chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, said the cohort scheduled to graduate next month consists mainly of students admitted during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a period marked by unprecedented disruptions in the education sector.

He explained that because national A-Level examinations were delayed during the pandemic, Makerere was unable to admit students through the direct entry scheme, forcing the university to rely heavily on diploma holders, who tradi-

# Why Mak will graduate fewer students this year



## TRANSCRIPTS

In a departure from previous years, Makerere University has also finalised and printed all academic transcripts ahead of the graduation ceremony.

Prof Nawangwe said graduates who have fulfilled their financial obligations to the university can collect their transcripts immediately or wait until the graduation days.

The Makerere University Vice Chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, at a press conference at Makerere University on Wednesday. PHOTO/GEOFREY MUTUMBA

tionally form a smaller intake.

Despite the reduced numbers, university management insists the figures do not signal decline but rather reflect a strategic shift in academic focus.

The academic registrar, Prof Mukadasi Buyinza, however said the numbers will

return to normal next year.

Prof Buyinza said the current graduating class includes 185 PhD holders, 2,034 Master's graduates, 6,043 Bachelor's degree holders, 137 postgraduate certificate holders, and 33 postgraduate diploma graduates.

"I am proud to announce that in comparison to the 75th graduation, we have registered a 30 percent growth in graduate student output," he said, adding, "This is a result of our strategic decision to prioritise graduate education in line with our research-led agenda."

Prof Nawangwe added that the university is recording its highest number of PhD graduates in a single graduation ceremony, which he described as a major milestone in Makerere's long-term strategic plan.

"It shows that we are steadily moving towards our goal of becoming a research-led institution," he said, adding, "By 2030, we shall be admitting and graduating more graduate students compared to undergraduate ones."

Meanwhile, statistics released by the university indicate a shift in gender composition among graduates this year, with male students outnumbering females, reversing last year's trend.

During the 75th graduation ceremony last year, 7,297 of the 13,658 graduates were female, compared to 6,361 males, a difference of 936. This year, however, 4,402 males will graduate compared to 4,030 females, a difference of 372.

The deputy vice chancellor for academic affairs, Prof Sarah Ssali, said the gender gap remains relatively small and reflects progress toward gender balance.