

# GOVT BANS REGISTRATION OF PRIVATE CANDIDATES UNDER UPE

It has become a practice for some parents with learners in top primary schools to register them in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools for Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE).

Many parents assume that when their children are registered in UPE schools, they would be favoured during marking of scripts, something the Government has called false.

This has not only led to disruptions among the candidates, but also increased government spending on examinations, since the Government pays PLE fees for all UPE pupils.

It is against this background that the Government has ordered that the practice be stopped.

"The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) has reported that some education officials have facilitated the registration of private candidates as UPE candidates, thereby defrauding the Government. This is completely unacceptable," the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, said.

She made the announcement yesterday at State House Nakasero in Kampala during the release of the 2025 PLE results.

Speaking to *Weekend Vision* on the sidelines, Dr Dennis Mugimba, the education ministry spokesperson, dubbed the registration of private candidates as UPE 'illegal'.

"The ministry, through UNEB, has detected this illegality. We want to caution parents against the vice. UNEB will reject them."

Relatedly, during the release, Mrs Museveni tasked the education ministry technical team with ensuring that private examinations bureaus are stopped.

She said they have noted the mushrooming of private examinations bureaus that have continued to distort the purpose of learning and that they need to stop.

"Learning is not about passing exams only, but demonstrating acquisition of desired competences. So, the argument that examination bureaus can continue with their ways because the Government liberalised the economy does not hold

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any water," Mrs Museveni said.

"Therefore, I have asked the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports [Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda] to diagnose where the loopholes could be in the practice of examination bureaus."

Mrs Museveni said these loopholes must be closed by either enforcing the existing legal and regulatory frameworks or formulating new frameworks where none exists.

Earlier, Dan Odongo, the UNEB executive director, shared that the matter of private examination bureaus was raised in reports by respective subject examiners.

"Examiners have also pointed out the negative impact of [examination] papers developed and circulated to schools by so-called examination bureaus just before the UNEB examination. These items are dangerous. They are discouraging teachers from developing content and test items from the topics covered in the syllabus," he said.

Odongo added that now teachers rely on these examinations and that they are sold at premium prices to schools.

## PRIVATE SECTOR SPEAKS OUT

A section of private

education providers has called for engagements with the ministry before the private examination bureaus are stopped.

Hasadu Kirabira, the national chairperson of National Private Education Institutions Association (NPEIA), said these bureaus play a key role in the preparation of candidates for the final assessment.

While the teachers can develop tests internally, Kirabira said many schools, both private and public, do not have printers and that, therefore, depend on these private bureaus for tests.

For some schools, he said, they buy examination items from external private bureaus for checks and scrutiny of the respective teachers.

"As NPEIA, we have this private examination bureau. Many schools, willingly, apply and pay for these examinations. We do not deploy them to challenge UNEB. Rather we need these external examinations

to check on our teachers and our systems. Schools subject learners to these external exams for trials," Kirabira said.

He asked the Government to engage private players before a decision is taken.

In a separate interview, another private player, who spoke on anonymity grounds, indicated that printing examinations or tests internally is expensive and that is why they depend on these external sets.

"Some rural schools, especially those without a resemblance of a UNEB examiner, cannot set standard tests. In such schools, they find it important to have external papers from these private bureaus," the source said.

Alternatively, the source urged the Government through UNEB and the National Curriculum Development Centre to adopt the practice of setting pre-tests (commonly known as mocks) to prepare learners for the final exams.

Such pre-tests, the source said, will bring the various learners to speed, expose them to unique language and competences during continuous assessment.

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