

Exams fees: Ministry must wake up and smell the coffee

On April 1, the Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) released a circular to all heads of primary and secondary schools, district education officers and school inspectors across the country, in which it guided on registration of students for national examinations right from primary to higher secondary education.

Registration fees for Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) were set at Shs34,000, while late registration for PLE was set at Shs68,000; registration fee for each Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) candidate was set at Shs164,000; addition fees for each private UCE candidate was set at Shs15,000; registration fee for each Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) candidate was set at Shs186,000; additional fee for each private UACE candidate was set at Shs18,000.

The issue:

Exam registration fees.

Our view:

The government is constitutionally mandated to provide basic and higher education as a social service to its citizens. The failure to regulate has increasingly turned education into a money-making enterprise and not the social service that it is meant to be.

The circular stated that late registration fees for each UCE and UACE candidate can attract a surcharge of between 50 and 100 percent of the total registration fee, depending on the payment period. This particular provision means that late registration fees would range between Shs246,000 and Shs328,000 for a UCE candidate and between Shs279,000 and Shs372,000 for a UACE candidate.

Unfortunately, many schools have ignored the provisions of the circular and are demanding late registration fees of up to Shs450,000 for UCE candidates and Shs600,000 for UACE candidates.

That means that they are demanding Shs130,000 more than the official fee prescribed by Uneb for UCE candidates and more than Shs227,778 more than for UACE candidates. This is unacceptable.

These extortionist demands come at a time when most ordinary Ugandans are going through tough times. Most parents have only been able to send their children back to school for the second term of the academic year by entering into some arrangements with the schools to have the school fees paid in a staggered manner.

The Ministry of Education and Sports, which is supposed to regulate the education sector, is and has been missing for quite a while now. The failure to enforce an August 31, 2023, declaration that schools were not allowed to hike school

fees without clearance from the permanent secretary, the chief administrative officers or the town clerks is testimony enough.

The government is constitutionally mandated to provide basic and higher education as a social service to its citizens. The failure to regulate has increasingly turned education into a money-making enterprise and not the social service that it is meant to be. Officials from the Ministry of Education must wake up and smell the coffee.

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