

Increase university government sponsorship slots

As the dust settles after the annual release of university government sponsorship beneficiaries list, a familiar cycle of anxiety and heartbreak is gripping thousands of Senior Six leavers and their parents. Whereas many students celebrate their success after the release of results, the excitement is often cut short by the harsh reality of exorbitant tuition at university and other tertiary institutions.

Currently, the Government of Uganda sponsors only 4,000 students annually to study in public universities. This figure has remained stagnant for many years despite a massive surge in the number of candidates qualifying for university education each year.

It should be noted that the Government increased the number of students it sponsors for university education from 2,000 to 4,000 after the 2001 presidential elections and 25 years later, the figure has remained the same.

However, to ensure equity

and fulfil the promise of “protecting the gains” of UPE [Universal Primary Education] and USE [Universal Secondary Education], increasing the quota to 10,000 students per year would be reasonable.

The current sponsorship of 4,000 students, split into 3,000 for national merit and 1,000 for the district quota, sports and disability schemes, is no longer reflective of the current prevailing educational landscape.

According to the Uganda National Examinations Board, 166,400 candidates registered for the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education exams in 2025. Out of that figure, 113,291 (68.6%) got two principal passes, a minimum requirement for admission to degree programme. This means that less than 45 of the learners benefited from the government sponsorship list of



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the 2026/2027 academic year.

If Uganda is to achieve its Vision 2040 goals of transforming into a modern and prosperous country, it cannot afford to leave 96% of its brightest minds behind. Remember, when these started Primary One, they were seven million.

One of the most compelling arguments for increasing the

sponsorship pool is the current geographical and economic imbalance.

Data from the 2025/2027 academic year reveals that government sponsorship has largely become a reward for the rich rather than a safety net for the poor. For example, Makerere University admitted 1,364 students on national merit. Out of these, 730 (53.5%) were female and 634 (46.5%) were male.

Most tellingly, 746 (54.7%) were from central region, 300 (22.0%) from western, 200 (14.7%) from eastern, and only 118 (8.7%) from northern region. As they say, the devil is in the details. So, expanding the number will enable other regions to benefit significantly.

Furthermore, increasing the quota to 10,000 and coupling it with a policy to ring-fence slots for public schools, the government can

ensure that taxpayer-funded scholarships reach the most deserving beneficiaries — the poor and vulnerable learners. This change would restore government schools to their central role and prevent private school proprietors from using results simply to market their high fees.

Expanding sponsorship is not just about fairness; it is an economic necessity. Fulfilling Uganda’s development agenda requires a workforce skilled in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Currently, the high cost of science-based degrees prevents many bright students, particularly girls, from entering technical fields. This leads to a high dropout rate where, the higher one goes in the education system, the fewer girls remain.

Increasing the quota would allow for more robust

support for the “STEMinism” or “science” movement. It would enable the government to sponsor more students entering via the Higher Education Access Certificate (HEAC), a vital one-year bridge for students who obtained subsidiary passes at A’level, but have the potential to succeed in high-paying technical careers.

Thus, increasing government sponsorship to 10,000 slots is necessary. It would democratise access to higher education, address regional disparities and ensure that the gains of a student in a rural seed school are just as valid as one in an urban elite school.

It is time to invest in the nation’s future by making university education a reality for more than just the elite few.

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