

**Busy.** There is frantic activity at the university as prospective entrants to the law course this year prepare to sit for pre-entry exams next Saturday.

BY PATIENCE AHIMBISIBWE  
pahimbisibwe@ug.nationmedia.com

**L**aw is one of the most popular courses that students seek to pursue at university, and to many who want to study, Makerere University is their first institution of choice.

For this reason, there is frantic activity at the university as prospective entrants to the law course this year prepare to sit for pre-entry exams on Saturday next week. To sit the exams, one is required to pay the university Shs110,000. But before that, there is the element of coaching, and some players do make a bit of money out of it.

This reporter, in the course of researching for this story, attended one of the coaching sessions after paying a deposit of Shs20,000. This was after intense haggling because the instructor wanted a minimum of Shs50,000 per session.

Since this reporter had enrolled late, in March, the instructor said he would accept Shs200,000 for the whole coaching course, otherwise those who enrolled in January had parted with Shs400,000.

#### The sessions

The sessions involve revisiting past papers which the university previously issued for the course. It is basically current affairs, general knowledge, aptitude, reading, comprehension, numerical skills and ana-

# The scuffle for ticket to Makerere's law school



**Admission.** Students wait to receive admission letters in different disciplines at Makerere University last year. Students seeking to be admitted for law course are subjected to pre-entry exams. PHOTO BY ALEX ESAGALA

lytical writing skills.

But the vice chancellor, Prof Barnabas Nawangwe, says coaching students for pre-entry exams is not permitted.

"We have discouraged people from coaching pre-entry exams because what we ask is not from class. We don't want it on campus. It is illegal. They are not supposed to use our university facilities. That is wasting people's money," Prof Nawangwe

said. However, the coaching sessions are conducted in university halls of residence and some lecture rooms.

Dr Yusuf Nsubuga, who retired as director of basic education in the Ministry of Education, says he opposed the idea of pre-entry exams from the start.

"I have never supported that idea of pre-entry examinations. It undermines the government institutions; it undermines Uneb [Uganda National

Examinations Board] assessment. For a government institution to set pre-entry exams is absurd. If government universities set these tests, it is a vote of no-confidence in the ministry and Uneb, which is mandated to assess students," Dr Nsubuga said.

Mr Dan Odongo, the Uneb executive secretary, said in an earlier interview that while it is within the mandate of universities to set their admission requirements, it is better the university re-emphasises the foundational subjects like History, Economics, Religious Education and Literature in English as entry requirements to the course.

He said: "Even when a university sets pre-entry exams for law, they still require the candidates to have passed their UACE [Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education]. They have never gone on the streets to say all those who want to study law come and sit pre-entry. This means they recognise that UACE is valid," Mr Odongo said.

According to Mr Odongo, their research on pre-entry exams in 2016 established that candidates who had passed the tests highly had equally passed the UACE examinations.

#### UNIVERSITY SPEAKS OUT

**D**r Vincent Ssembatya, the director for quality assurance at Makerere University, says pre-entry exams have assisted the university to deal with certain problems.

"The selection of law school had stalled. It could be early to judge, but we had failed to select students to join the course. We can have more than 100 applicants to the course yet we may have only 60 slots. What criteria could one use? We had explored all avenues and it was tough.

More than 90 per cent of the entrants were girls. Not because it was a bad thing; but the boys were being left out because of the 1.5 [additional points that girls get on the affirmative ticket]," Dr Ssembatya says.

Dr Christopher Mbazira, the principal of Makerere University Law School, says the pre-entry issue is not handled only by the school he heads.

He says there is a committee in the university's senate responsible for conducting the tests, and the

school only receives those students who have passed the pre-entry exams.

He says they haven't conducted an assessment to evaluate the progress since it was introduced six years ago.

"We don't administer the pre-entry. It is done by senate pre-entry sub-committee. We only receive candidates who have gone through. We are in the process of conducting an assessment to see whether it is adding value, probably next academic year," Dr Mbazira says.