

High tuition fees, poor welfare mar

In case you are looking for a university, at times the best people to guide you are former students. Stephen Ssenkaaba dissects a survey done by our research team for your guidance



Makerere University students registering for their programmes. Most students register after clearing tuition fees

There might be no better way to assess the performance of our higher education institutions, particularly universities, than through feedback from these institutions' direct beneficiaries former and current students.

As consumers of university services, students participate in the day-to-day activities of university life. And because they are part of all that goes on around their institutions, they have a first-hand experience of university affairs. Students experience the failures and successes of their universities. They know what works and what does not. They, therefore, provide reliable and useful feedback on the performance of their universities.

A recent *New Vision* survey that sought to ascertain how recent graduates perceived their former universities gives pointers on the performance of Uganda's major universities in different areas.

University, Nkumba university and Kampala International University (KIU).

In order to get a fair representation of all rankings from the universities of interest, the researchers randomly selected a pre-determined number of former students from each of the nine universities. Respondents were asked to rate their former universities on a number of parameters, including learning resources, tuition fees, teaching staff, discipline, students' welfare, personal development, study arrangements and premises.

Here, they were required to state whether their former university adequately handled the above mentioned issues. For instance, under the learning resources parameter, respondents considered whether the library resources and services were good enough for their learning

Each university's respondents

University	No. of Students
Makerere University	200
Makerere University Business School	150
Kyambogo University	100
Kampala International University	50
Mbarara University of Science and Technology	50
Nkumba University	50
Ndejje University	50
Uganda Martyr's University Nkozi	50
Uganda Christian University, Mukono	100
Total	800

needs; whether library opening hours suited them and whether they were able to access IT (Information Technology) resources like computers and

Internet facilities when they needed to.

For studying arrangements, respondents considered whether their university provided enough tools for studying. They also considered if these tools were in good working condition and readily available whenever needed and whether lecture rooms were spacious and organised.

As far as teaching staff goes, respondents shared views about their lecturers' competence to explain concepts, enthusiasm in class, relevant professional skills and if they were fair in assessing class work.

In personal development, the students considered whether studying at university sharpened their soft skills, such as confidence, as well as communication and problem-solving skills.

As per university premises, respondents considered

whether their property was safe at the University. They also looked at the availability of amenities like lighting in study/lecture room/labs, comfortable lecture rooms and accessibility to premises for disabled and other disadvantaged students. Tidiness of the premises and availability of signposts to aid movement to different offices was also considered.

GENERAL FINDINGS

In general, the study shows that most students share nearly the same concerns about their former universities. For instance, there is a general dissatisfaction with how all nine universities handle student welfare, study arrangements and premises.

Tuition also generally remains an area

of great concern in nearly all the nine sampled universities, with more respondents saying they wished their universities could reduce tuition fees. There is generally more satisfaction with personal development programmes, teaching staff and learning resources.

THE TUITION CONTROVERSY

"High" tuition fees was highlighted by most respondents as one of the major problems experienced during their time at university, many of them wishing their universities had been more flexible in setting tuition payment schedules. Several others wishing their institutions had reduced tuition fees while they were still at university.

The issue of tuition fees remains divisive with students crying foul over what they call "high" tuition rates and the university administrators insisting that, in light of the high cost needed to offer quality university education, the fees are as reasonable.

"We hope that parents decide to send their children to university well-aware of the expenses involved. It is, therefore, not good for them to turn around and say that tuition is too expensive," Prof. Hannington Ssegendo, the vice chancellor of Nkumba University said.

Ssegendo clarified that a private university like Nkumba needs money to operate and when students do not pay in time it affects the operations of the institutions. He also said that universities always provide flexible payment schedules to allow students enough time to find money and pay.

"For instance, we allow 60% of the fees in the first month with the rest of the balance to be completed with in six weeks."

Prof. Eriabu Lugujjo, the vice chancellor of Ndejje University, also says students ought to understand that Ugandan universities pay some of the lowest tuition fees in Africa and beyond.

"This is bearing in mind that sustaining university programmes costs a lot of money," he said.

Overall, graduates from Makerere University were most satisfied with the university's personal development programmes. The same with their counterparts from MUBS, Kyambogo, Kampala International University as well as Ndejje and Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Uganda Christian University and Uganda Martyrs University former students were most satisfied with teaching staff. The greatest dissatisfaction from Makerere University alumni was discipline.

For MUBS, KIU, Ndejje University and Uganda Martyrs University graduates,

graduates' university experience

range from Ksh100,000 to 120,000 (sh3.3m to sh3.9m) for private students from East Africa.

The same courses in any of the Ugandan universities range from sh1.8m to sh2.5m a year. A bachelor of arts degree in South Africa's University of Cape Town for the first year costs \$3,020 (sh10.1m) per year.

Except for Makerere University and MUBS, discipline was highly rated in the rest of the universities that were sampled. Quite understandable as most of the universities in the study are faith-based and, therefore, put a high premium on morals for their students.

THE WISH LIST

Former students from different universities expressed what they would have wished for their university to have done during their time there. Makerereans said they would have wished for more practical than theoretical course units and flexibility in payment of tuition fees.

Former MUBS students said they would have wished for a reduction in tuition fees and more support from their university in finding internship and job placements.

Kyambogo University former students wished for reduction in tuition fees and more spacious lecture rooms, while KIU former students, cared most about reduction in tuition fees and more practical course units as was the case with UCU graduates.

Former Nkumba students wished for more scholarships while Ndejje graduates wished for more textbooks in the library. UCU former students in addition to reduction in tuition fees said they would have wanted to have more practical courses, while MUST graduates wished for more help with internships and job placements.

IMPLICATIONS

If this study reveals anything, it is that apart from tuition fees, many universities have yet to fix students' welfare and living conditions.

It is also clear that students want their universities to prepare them better for the world of work. That is why the issue of support on placement for internship and jobs, as well as introduction of practical courses, features prominently as one of the big concerns for former students. And yet, operating in constrained conditions, characterised by high operational costs due to limited funding and intermittent payment of fees by students, Universities find themselves trapped between a hard place and a rock.

STATE OF UNIVERSITIES STAFFING

The staffing situation in



Some of the 2011 UCU graduands. UCU students are most satisfied with the teaching staff

Ugandan universities is not pleasing and this has implications on the quality of teaching.

In 2011, based on a study by Prof. Abdu Kasozi, the former executive director of the National Council for Higher Education, Uganda's academic staff were neither sufficient nor highly qualified nor distinguished in knowledge production or publications. In that year, there was a total of 8,594 academic staff in the whole higher education sub-sector of whom 914 (or 10%) had PhDs, 3,657 (or 42%) had masters degrees, 2,923 (or 34%) had Bachelor's degrees, 269 (or 0.3%) had postgraduate

diplomas, 748 (or 0.9 %) had ordinary diplomas and 191 (or 0.2%) had certificates.

NCHE requirement was that each university should have at least 60% of its academic staff with PhDs. Almost no university attained that level in 2011. The insufficiency of the academic staff was further demonstrated by the sector average staff to student ratio, which stood at 1:26, instead of 1:12 as required by NCHE.

Prevalence of part-time staff also indicated the dearth of academics. In 2011, full-time staff were 65% total but some of them were registered as full time at more than one institution. Yet,

except Makerere and a few religiously based universities, few institutions had staff development programmes to train the next generation of academics.

FEES TOO LOW

In most universities, students pay about 40% of the annual cost of the programmes they are registered for.

Government institutions, with decreasing government budget allocations to education, coupled with aging infrastructure, decreasing inability to purchase inputs and increasing student numbers, are the most affected by the gap between fees paid and

what it costs them to graduate a student.

In public and private institutions, fees paid are lower than the unit costs. A study done by the National Council for Higher Education for the year 2008/9 for four public universities found the following costs (above).

The money received as fees in the universities surveyed were far lower than the above costs, meaning that there was a gap between fees paid and unit costs, which could only be filled by delivering inferior education.

It is true that fees are not the only sources of income for universities. However, in

Uganda, fees constitute the major source of income for education institutions as they make up to 60% and over of annual institutional budgets. Donations, endowments and business activities do not, for most higher education institutions in this country, constitute a significant component of annual budgets. Fees remain the financial lifeblood of institutions. If universities are to deliver quality higher education, they need to receive full payment of what it costs them to educate a student from fees or the government. What is required are innovative ideas to raise money for funding higher education.

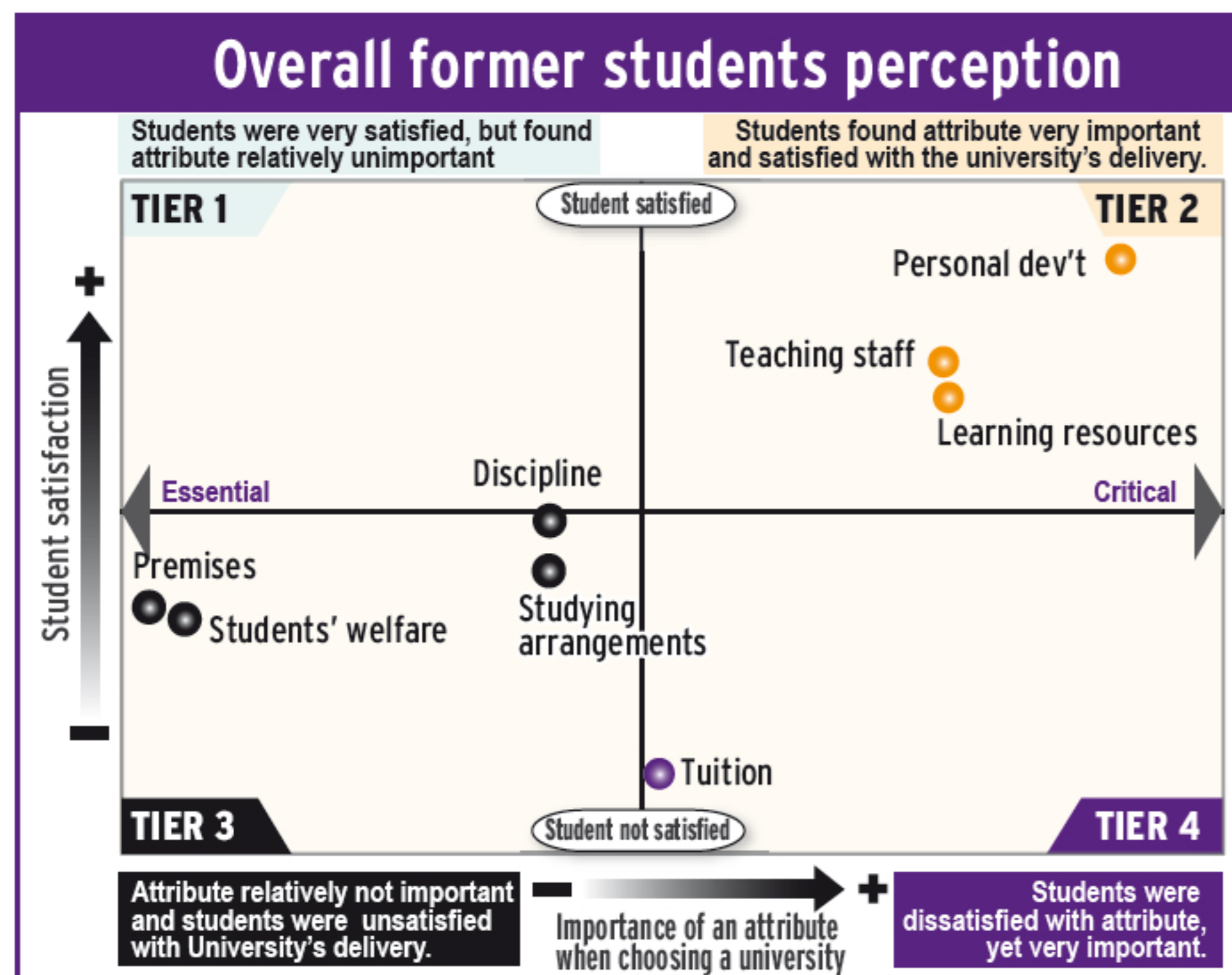
RECOMMENDED FEES PER YEAR

- Bachelor of agriculture sh9,406,106
- Bachelor of arts sh4,252,764
- Bachelor of development Studies sh4,019,799
- Bachelor of business administration sh4,179,822
- Bachelor of education with arts sh5,655,301.
- Bachelor of education with sciences sh5,989,039
- Bachelor of economics sh4,219,708
- Bachelor of medicine & Surgery sh10,565,591
- Bachelor of Sciences sh7,882,535
- Bachelor of Statistics sh4,003,911
- Bachelor of information technology sh3,364,669

THE STUDY METHOD

The objective was to determine whether former students were satisfied or not by the services offered by their alma mater. Conducted from February 25 to February 29, 2016, the study sampled 800 respondents – all of them through face-to-face interviews and semi-structured questionnaires.

Respondents were selected among male (57%) and female graduates (43%) who live or work in and around Kampala district and completed their undergraduate studies between 2012 and 2016. Because of ease of access, respondents were selected from nine major universities namely: Makerere University, Uganda Christian University Mukono (UCU), Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi (UMU), Kyambogo University, Makerere University Business School (MUBS), Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Ndejje



Experts' view

What can be done to improve the situation

Prof. AB Kasozi, research associate at Makerere Institute of Social Research and former executive director of the National Council for Higher Education



Many of the challenges in service delivery in universities revolve around poor funding. That is why parents and guardians have to find means to pay universities to enable them provide the facilities needed. If they do not pay, the universities will not have the money to hire lecturers and to buy learning tools. It means many of the university programmes will not provide quality services. As a result of this, universities will produce half-baked graduates without the requisite skills to perform in the world of work.

Jessica Alupo Minister of Education and Sports

While issues of student welfare and tuition remain critical, universities have to work closely with the student representatives to forge a way forward on some of these challenges.

Students' representatives should work closely with senate to get them to hear matters from the students' point of view. There should be greater use of administrative mechanisms at different universities to help address some of the issues that are highlighted as bringing dissatisfaction among students.

Concerning tuition, university students need to understand that tuition fees are critical to university operations. In Uganda, for instance, they

ought to learn that we pay the lowest university tuition rates compared to other countries. To do this successfully, universities have to provide a break-down of the tuition fees to the students and explain to them what it does and probably see the need for what they call "high rates".

The universities and other Tertiary Institutions Act should be reviewed to include more aspects on management of universities. This is one of the issues that we shall discuss at the upcoming conference on higher education.

This survey highlights the teething challenges that beset university education in this country.

