

Mak Restructures PhD Program, Introduces Modular Cohort-Based Model

Makerere University has unveiled a significant restructuring of its PhD by Research program, transitioning to a modular, cohort-based structure. The announcement was made by the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training (DRGT) during the CERTL International Conference at Fairway Hotel on November 16, 2024.

The new framework, which takes effect in the 2024/2025 academic year, aims to enhance the quality, structure, and completion rates of doctoral training while supporting the university's research-led vision.

Prof. Julius Kikooma, Deputy Director of the DRGT, explained that the changes address longstanding challenges in the PhD program, including unclear guidelines and milestones that left many students struggling to progress. “The traditional system lacked the structure needed to ensure consistent supervision and support for our students,” he said. “This new model introduces clear processes and creates an environment where both students and supervisors can succeed.”

The modular curriculum will require students to complete at least 40 credit units over three years, with a focus on core knowledge areas, research development, and communication. “Courses like research methods, scholarly writing, and communication skills are now mandatory, equipping students with the foundational skills they need to excel,” Prof. Kikooma noted. Students will also engage in teaching assistantships and modules on scientific communication to prepare for roles in academia and research.

Admissions under the new system will be cohort-based, with two intakes annually—one in June and another in October. This approach promotes peer collaboration and synchronizes student progress. “By admitting students in cohorts, we’re fostering a sense of community and ensuring that they can support one another through the challenges of doctoral study,” said Prof. Kikooma.

The framework also introduces reforms to supervision, including mandatory training for supervisors every five years. Supervisors will now receive guidance in pedagogy and research mentorship to ensure effective student support. Progress will be closely monitored through the Results and Information Management System (RIMS), and Graduate Program Coordinators will provide additional assistance.

Students will also benefit from updated policies outlined in the 2024 Graduate Handbook, which introduces clearer milestones for progression, ethical research guidelines, and intellectual property standards. “This handbook is a game-changer,” Prof. Kikooma said. “It gives students a roadmap for their journey, with clear expectations at every stage.”

The DRGT will oversee the implementation of the framework, working closely with colleges, departments, and administrative units to ensure smooth integration. Prof. Kikooma emphasized that the changes are part of a broader strategy to make Makerere University a leader in graduate education.

“Our goal is to create a research environment that allows our scholars to innovate and thrive,” he said. “This is about more than just completing a degree—it’s about equipping students to make meaningful contributions to society.”

The first modules under the new system, including Philosophy of Methods and Scholarly Writing, are scheduled for implementation the next academic year.

Details of the reforms in the presentations attached.

By Jane Anyango

Communication Officer CHUSS