Draft Report for the 14th Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum Conference Held at Best Western Hotel – Entebbe

on

16th – 17th October, 2025

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1.0 Executive Summary

The 14th Annual Conference of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum (UVCF), held on 16th–17th October 2025 at Best Western Hotel, Entebbe, brought together Vice Chancellors, policymakers, and higher education stakeholders to discuss the state of higher education amid economic challenges. The conference provided a dynamic platform for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and strategic deliberation, aimed at strengthening institutional resilience, innovation, and quality across universities in Uganda.

The event among other things featured a panel discussion moderated by Professor Patrick Kyamanywa which explored ways of sustaining quality education during financial constraints, with panelists including Mr.Paul Musasiizi, CEO of Kiira Motors Corporation and representative from the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA); Dr. Denis Mugimba, from the Ministry of Education and Sports; and Dr. Olive Sabiiti, Vice Chancellor of Cavendish University Uganda.

The conference also featured presentations on critical aspects of higher education, including university financing models for resilience, staff motivation and productivity, research visibility, digital student engagement, collaborative resource sharing, and the Triple Helix model for higher education. It also highlighted the importance of digital transformation, strategic partnerships, and innovation to sustain quality and competitiveness.

Participants deliberated and endorsed key resolutions to address challenges in higher education:

i. **Strengthening Quality Education in a Constrained Economy**: Universities were encouraged to adopt innovative, efficient, and collaborative approaches to maintain quality amid economic challenges. Members endorsed the Triple Helix + Society model to enhance cooperation among government, academia, industry, and communities.
ii. **Reforming University Funding and Promoting Financial Sustainability**: Participants called for a review of financing models, recommending performance-based grants, tax incentives, alumni endowments, and expanding student loan schemes to private and TVET learners.
iii. **Advancing Curriculum Reform and Industry Alignment:** Universities were encouraged to realign curricula to industry and societal needs through competency-based and cooperative education, extend internship periods for practical learning, and adopt STEAM education to foster creativity and innovation.
iv. **Enhancing Research, Innovation, and Technological Advancement**: It was suggested that research funding should include private universities and target projects with community impact. Institutions were urged to promote innovation in areas like e-mobility and digital transformation, with UVCF coordinating Triple Helix partnerships.
v. **Promoting Digital Transformation and Connectivity:** Universities were encouraged to strengthen digital infrastructure and join RENU to improve access to online learning and research resources, supporting inclusive and innovative higher education.
vi. **Strengthening Governance and Institutional Positioning:** Institutions needed to define unique strategic niches, adopt business-minded governance, include private sector expertise on Councils, and strengthen alumni networks for institutional growth and sustainability.
vii. **Expanding Equity, Access, and Enrollment in Higher Education:** With national enrollment at only 5%, universities needed to widen access through inclusive programs aligned with national priorities and enhance staff motivation and support, particularly in underfunded disciplines.

viii. **Fostering Collaboration Over Competition:** Universities were urged to collaborate rather than compete, sharing resources, expertise, and innovation spaces, with private sector partnerships recognized as key drivers of collective progress.

The conference concluded with reflections on actionable strategies and reinforced the collective responsibility of universities, government, and stakeholders in ensuring that higher education remains resilient, innovative, and responsive to national development priorities. The closing remarks were delivered by Mr. Timothy Musoke Ssejjoba, on behalf of the Honorable Minister for Higher Education, Dr. JC Muyingo.

1.1 Introduction

The theme of the 14th Annual UVCF Conference was **"Delivering Quality Higher Education in a Challenging Economic Environment"**. The event brought together Vice Chancellors, senior university administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders from across Uganda's higher education sector to deliberate on strategies for sustaining and improving quality amidst resource constraints.

The conference commenced with arrival and registration, managed efficiently by the Secretariat and coordinated by Mr. Dennis Lukaaya, the Master of Ceremony. Participants were warmly welcomed, including panelists and members representing their respective universities and professional capacities. The session opened with a prayer led by Professor Peruth Ntambireki, Vice Chancellor of Uganda Pentecostal University, followed by participant introductions to facilitate acquaintance and networking among attendees and their institutions.

Over two days, participants engaged in an interactive panel discussion, paper presentations, and knowledge-sharing sessions, exploring practical solutions for financial sustainability, staff motivation, digital transformation, research visibility, and institutional collaboration. The conference emphasized the need for universities to adopt innovative approaches, strengthen partnerships with industry and government, and leverage technology to enhance both administrative efficiency and academic outcomes.

The opening of the conference was marked by welcome remarks from Professor Paul Waako, Chairperson of UVCF, followed by the address of the Guest of Honour, Hon. James Kubeketerya, who highlighted the government's commitment to supporting higher education despite economic pressures. A panel discussion, moderated by Professor Patrick Kyamanywa, examined strategies for delivering quality education under financial constraints, featuring insights from both the private and public sectors.

The conference also provided a platform for presentations on diverse topics, including university financing models, digital student journeys, collaborative resource sharing, research visibility, and staff retention and productivity. These presentations reinforced the critical role of strategic planning, innovation, and collaborative approaches in maintaining high-quality higher education across Uganda. (All presentations are available and can be accessed via https://uvcf.ac.ug/2025-conference/)

2.0 Remarks.

The conference commenced with a formal opening remarks segment. This session provided an opportunity to acknowledge distinguished guests, highlight the purpose and significance of the gathering, and establish a collaborative atmosphere for dialogue. Key welcome remarks during this segment gave a background for the importance of collective action among universities, policymakers, and stakeholders in strengthening higher education quality and institutional resilience.

This opening ceremony was officiated by the performance of our National Anthem, reflecting our shared commitment to national development, and the opening prayer led by Professor Peruth Ntambireki, Vice-Chancellor of Uganda Pentecostal University, seeking guidance and blessings from God for fruitful deliberations.

Figure 1: Prof. Peruth Ntambireki leading the Conference Opening Prayer

2.1 UVCF Chairperson's Welcome Remarks: Given by Prof. Paul Waako

The Chairperson gave the following opening remarks:

Distinguished Chief Guest, Honorable James Kubekutererya**,** Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Sports,Your Excellency, Ambassador Alhaji Badru Ddungu Kateregga**,**
Professor Eriabu Lugujjo**,** - the Executive Director of the Uganda Vice-Chancellors' Forum,
Esteemed Vice-Chancellors,
Deputy Vice-Chancellors,
Academic Registrars, and all university leaders present,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct pleasure to warmly welcome you to this important gathering of the Uganda Vice-Chancellors' Forum. Today, we are privileged to have with us a distinguished assembly of university leaders, including Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Academic Registrars from across the country. Your presence demonstrates the collective commitment of Uganda's higher education leadership to sustaining and enhancing quality education, even in challenging times. We are especially honored to have Honorable James Kubekutererya as our Chief Guest. Your leadership and advocacy for education in Parliament are invaluable to the advancement of higher education in Uganda. We also recognize the presence of Ambassador Alhaj Badru Kateregga, whose distinguished service in academia continues to inspire excellence across institutions.

Figure 2 Prof. Paul Waako Giving Opening Remarks

I am confident that over the course of this conference, we will engage in meaningful dialogue, share experiences, and identify strategies to strengthen our universities, improve governance, and enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education across Uganda. Together, through collaboration, innovation, and commitment, we can continue to drive excellence in higher education for the benefit of our students, communities, and the nation at large.

Once again, I warmly welcome all of you to this gathering and wish us productive and successful deliberations. He welcomed Honourable Kubetekerya James to say a few remarks to the participants.

2.2 **Remarks from the Chief Guest: Honorable James Kubekutererya, Chairperson, Parliamentary Committee on Education and Sports**

The Chief Guest, warmly welcomed participants and expressed strong support for the collaborative efforts between private and public universities in Uganda. He acknowledged the participation of over 55 Vice-Chancellors, along with representatives from government bodies and other higher education stakeholders, highlighting the growing influence and collective voice of the Vice-Chancellors' Forum in shaping national higher education policy.

He further highlighted a number of issues:

i. **University collaboration and governance**: The Chief Guest emphasized the importance of strengthening partnerships between private and public institutions. He noted that such collaboration benefits all students and contributes to unified advocacy for higher education within Parliament. He further underscored the need for oversight and accountability, proposing that designated personnel monitor university operations to ensure transparency and effectiveness.

ii. **Research funding initiatives:** In support of extending research funds to private universities, he emphasized that research should produce practical outcomes that empower both universities and students, ultimately benefiting the wider Ugandan community. He called for collaborative brainstorming to devise equitable strategies for research fund distribution.

Figure 3:Honorable James Kubekutererya giving Opening Speech

iii. **Curriculum development and industry alignment**: He highlighted the importance of reviewing university curricula to align with industry needs and the lower school curriculum. He encouraged collaboration with manufacturers and industry stakeholders to ensure graduates are workforce-ready. He also referenced the implementation of the TVET Act as a key framework for equipping students with relevant skills.

iv. **Innovation and technology education**: The Chief Guest celebrated student achievements, such as projects integrating the use of local resources like herbs, and stressed the need for increased support in technology education. He also expressed support for flexible admission policies, recognizing the diverse science programs offered across institutions and the importance of student choice in university selection.

v. Finally, he commended Kiira Motors for its significant contributions to science and technology in Uganda and across Africa. He encouraged other institutions to study Kiira Motors' model of innovation and collaboration and reiterated the government's commitment to supporting budgetary requirements for research, particularly initiatives with strong community engagement and technological impact.

He further re-affirmed Parliament's commitment to supporting higher education institutions through funding, policy guidance, and advocacy for innovation, collaboration, and practical research that contributes to national development.

3.0 Panel Discussion: Delivering Quality Higher Education in a Challenging Economic Environment.

The panel discussion was moderated by Professor Patrick Kyamanywa, Vice Chancellor of Uganda Martyrs University, and comprised a distinguished group of panelists: Mr. Paul Isaac Musasizi, representing the Uganda Manufacturers Association and Kiira Motors Corporation; Dr. Denis K. Mugimba from the Ministry of Education and Sports; and Dr. Olive Sabiiti, Vice Chancellor of Cavendish University Uganda. This diverse composition ensured a balanced representation of perspectives from government, industry, and academia.

Figure 4: Panel Discussants during the panel Discussion

The discussion emphasized the perspectives of government, industry, and academia, and underscored the critical need for collaboration between these stakeholders through the Triple Helix + Society model. Key challenges identified included funding limitations, misalignment between curricula and industry needs, shortage of PhD-qualified faculty, and the necessity to implement competency-based education by 2027. Panelists also highlighted the importance of institutional differentiation, curriculum reform, and digital transformation to enhance employability and innovation.

3.1 Moderator Overview – Prof. Patrick Kyamanywa

Professor Kyamanywa opened the discussion by stressing that quality in higher education must be viewed through multiple lenses: government (access and service), industry (skills and workforce readiness), and academia (relevance and outcomes).

Figure 5: Prof. Patrick Kyamanywa giving Overview to the Panel Discussion

The discussion highlighted that the current 8-week internship programs are insufficient to produce industry-ready graduates, particularly when students lack a strong theoretical foundation. He advocated for cooperative education models and early integration of practical skills into curricula. The moderator also noted the urgent need for universities to develop specific niches, align with industry priorities, and embrace digital transformation, AI integration, and research innovation.

3.2 Government Perspective – Dr. Denis K. Mugimba, Ministry of Education and Sports

Dr. Mugimba emphasized that **quality could be measured by access and service delivery**, highlighting the government's dual role in ensuring both equitable enrollment and practical skill development. He discussed the need for policy frameworks that support competency-based education, effective oversight of universities, and financial incentives for institutions engaging in impactful research. Dr. Mugimba also stressed the importance of expanding the student loan scheme and leveraging the TVET Act 2025 to support skills development in higher education.

Figure 6: Dr. Denis K. Mugimba giving government's perspective regarding the theme

3.3 Industry Perspective – Mr. Paul Isaac Musasizi, KIIRA Motors Corporation & UMA Representative

Mr. Musasizi focused on industry-aligned education, emphasizing workforce readiness and production outcomes. He identified three core dimensions of quality: technical and analytical skills, social behavioral competencies, and digital literacy, including AI integration. He called for restructuring internships to allow students to acquire practical skills effectively and advocated for stronger partnerships between universities and industry. Mr. Musasizi also highlighted opportunities for collaboration in battery research, e-mobility, and science and technology innovations, encouraging universities to integrate applied research projects aligned with market needs.

Figure 7: Mr. Paul Isaac Musasizi giving perspective of Industry regarding the conference theme

3.4 Academic Perspective – Dr. Olive Sabiiti, Vice-Chancellor, Cavendish University

Dr. Sabiiti emphasized that education must be relevant to society and economic development, with quality indicators including efficiency in student outcomes, development of 21st-century skills, entrepreneurship, employability, and sustainability in educational models.

She highlighted the need for universities to focus on institutional differentiation, pursue strategic niches rather than duplicating programs, and integrate industry partnerships to enhance practical learning. Dr. Sabiiti also noted the importance of academic freedom and innovation within a framework that balances regulatory compliance and public service.

Figure 8: Dr. Olive Sabiiti giving Universities' perspective of the conference theme

3.5 Key Discussion Points and Recommendations

3.5.1 Challenges Identified:

i. Limited funding, with public universities spending 62% of their budget on wages.
ii. Shortage of qualified faculty and declining appreciation of higher education.
iii. Misalignment between curriculum and industry needs; insufficient internship durations.
iv. Low higher education enrollment at 5%, with limited African representation in global initiatives.

3.5.2 Proposed Solutions:

i. Institutionalize Triple Helix + Society collaborations between government, industry, and academia.
ii. Curriculum reform to integrate STEAM education, cooperative learning, and industry-aligned competencies.
iii. Reform funding through block grants, performance-based funding, research grants, and leveraging endowments.
iv. Encourage universities to specialize in strategic niches to avoid duplication and enhance reputation.
v. Expand the student loan scheme to cover private universities and include skills-based lending.
vi. Strengthen governance by integrating private sector expertise and promoting collaboration over competition.
vii. Promote innovation and practical research with industry partnerships, particularly in emerging fields like e-mobility and battery technology.

3.6 Participant comments:

Following the panel discussion, participants engaged actively in a question-and-answer session, offering insights, raising concerns, and seeking clarifications on key issues discussed. Their comments and questions reflected a keen interest in practical solutions for enhancing quality higher education, particularly around curriculum relevance, industry-academia collaboration, innovation, funding models, and the role of the Triple Helix + Society framework. This interactive segment provided an opportunity for participants to highlight challenges, share perspectives from their institutions, and contribute to the development of actionable recommendations.

Participants highlighted the need to:

i. Balance focus between STEM and STEAM disciplines, addressing motivation disparities.
ii. Encourage industry to accept students from non-STEM backgrounds for innovative roles.
iii. Promote innovation rather than only problem-solving, fostering creativity from inception.
iv. Use the UVCF as a pivot for institutionalizing the Triple Helix model.
v. Explore Kiira Motors' technology models and facilitate student engagement despite high costs.
vi. Expand student financial support mechanisms, including skills levy and loans under the TVET Act.
vii. Prioritize collaboration over competition among universities.

Figure 9: Some of the participants reacting to the panel discussion.

In summary, the panel discussion reinforced that sustaining quality higher education in a constrained economic environment requires deliberate collaboration, curriculum reform, strategic funding, and industry partnerships. Universities were urged to differentiate their programmes, specialize in strategic niches, and embrace innovative approaches to teaching, research, and governance. The discussion provided actionable insights on aligning higher education with national development goals while fostering employability, research excellence, and technological innovation.

4.0 Presentations:

The conference featured a series of insightful presentations that showcased research findings, innovative practices, and strategic approaches to enhancing higher education in Uganda. Delivered by experts from universities, industry, and partner organizations, these sessions provided participants with practical knowledge, evidence-based recommendations, and emerging trends in areas such as university financing, staff motivation, digital transformation, research visibility, and collaborative resource sharing. Each presentation served as a platform for dialogue, reflection, and the exchange of ideas aimed at strengthening institutional resilience and academic excellence.

4.1 **RENU's Presentation: Visibility of Uganda's Research Output and Access to Premium Journals Mr. Nicholas Mbonimpa, Chief Executive Officer, RENU**

In his presentation, Mr. Mbonimpa focused on how Ugandan universities can enhance the global visibility of their research and improve access to premium journals. Drawing from the work and services of the Research and Education Network for Uganda (RENU), he illustrated how connectivity, digital infrastructure, and collaboration form the foundation for impactful research dissemination and visibility.

i. Strengthening Institutional Visibility

Mr. Mbonimpa noted that university visibility is influenced by two main indicators: People (researchers) and research output. He emphasized the importance of unique researcher identifiers such as ORCID, which enable institutions to manage researcher profiles, improve administrative efficiency, and enhance integrity in scholarly communication. Through the ORCID Consortium of Uganda, universities can now visualize inputs, outputs, and collaborations of all affiliated researchers on a unified platform, thereby strengthening their global ranking and reputation.

ii. Enhancing Access to Research Repositories and Journals

To promote open science and research sharing, RENU supports the establishment of digital repositories for member universities and facilitates the assignment of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) for published work. These initiatives ensure that research outputs are discoverable and easily citable across international platforms. Mr. Mbonimpa also highlighted RENU's collaboration with the Consortium of Uganda University Librarians (CUUL) and Research4Life, which collectively enable free access to premium publications and journals. Through the Identity Federation, researchers can access these resources securely and efficiently, removing barriers to scholarly content that were previously restricted by subscription costs.

iii. Connectivity as the Foundation for Research Visibility

Central to Mr. Mbonimpa's message was the role of connectivity as the backbone of research visibility. He contrasted RENU's model of free, uncapped local connectivity and unlimited data transfer with the constraints of commercial internet providers. RENU's 100 Gbps national backbone supports seamless access to educational and research resources, including shared lectures, virtual seminars, large file transfers, and real-time collaboration. The deployment of eduroam—a secure global Wi-Fi service—across campuses and metropolitan areas (Metro eduroam) has also transformed how researchers and students access academic networks both locally and internationally.

iv. Leveraging Cloud Services and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The presentation hightlighted the growing importance of the RENU Cloud, which offers universities a cost-effective and secure platform for data storage, manipulation, and computational research. He explained that RENU's Artificial Intelligence Strategy is built on six pillars, including infrastructure development, data governance, cybersecurity, capacity building, and innovation. This strategy aims to position Uganda's research community at the forefront of responsible and inclusive AI adoption, enabling data-driven teaching, learning, and innovation.

v. Governance, Standards, and Future Outlook

In closing, Mr. Mbonimpa reiterated that connectivity is only the foundation—true impact comes from coordinated governance, adherence to standards, and collaborative efforts among universities, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). He encouraged vice chancellors to leverage RENU's tools, services, and partnerships to strengthen research ecosystems, increase institutional visibility, and contribute meaningfully to Uganda's knowledge economy.

Figure 10: Mr. Mbonimpa giving RENU's Presentation

4.2 Active Health Break

In the course of the day's proceedings, participants took part in an Active Health Break designed to promote physical wellness and refreshment after the intense morning sessions. The brief interlude featured simple guided exercises aimed at helping participants stretch, re-energize, and enhance concentration for the remainder of the program.

Led in a light and engaging manner, the session encouraged movement, laughter, and interaction, allowing a relaxed atmosphere that balanced the formal deliberations of the conference.

The activity was warmly received, with participants actively taking part and expressing appreciation for the thoughtful inclusion of a health-focused break within the conference program. Photographs capturing these moments of movement and lively participation are attached below:

Figure 11: Conference participants during active health break.

5.0 Conference Sub Theme Presentations:

The conference featured a rich and insightful series of sub-theme presentations, each offering a critical perspective on how higher education institutions can build resilience, enhance quality, and strengthen operational efficiency in an era of constrained resources. The sessions brought together experienced leaders and experts who shared evidence-based reflections, practical models, and forward-looking strategies. The discussions covered a wide spectrum—from rethinking university financing models, to safeguarding quality amid rising costs, to addressing staff retention challenges, and exploring collaborative survival through resource sharing. Together, these presentations provided a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and trade-offs that shape institutional sustainability and academic excellence in Uganda’s higher education landscape.

5.1 Sub Theme 1: Reflection on University Financing Models for Resilience – Presented by Prof. Eriabu Lugujjo, Executive Director, Uganda Vice Chancellors’ Forum (UVCF)

Professor Eriabu Lugujjo delivered a reflective and forward-looking presentation on university financing models aimed at building institutional resilience and sustainability. He began by posing a critical question to the higher education community: *How can universities re-examine their financing models to ensure sustainability in the face of growing financial uncertainty?* With 55 universities across Uganda facing similar fiscal constraints, he stressed that the financial framework of each institution determines not only its growth trajectory but also its very survival.

Figure 12: Prof. Eraibu Lugujjo giving presentation on - Reflection on University funding models

Overreliance on a single revenue source, particularly student tuition, was identified as a key source of vulnerability.

i. The Vulnerability of Single-Pillar Funding

Professor Lugujjo highlighted that dependence on tuition income exposes universities to multiple risks including enrolment volatility, economic shocks, and affordability challenges. He explained that demographic changes or economic downturns can lead to reduced student numbers, immediately destabilizing institutional budgets. Moreover, inconsistent government subventions and limited diversification further weaken financial stability. He cautioned that "relying solely on tuition is akin to building a house on a single pillar—structural failure is inevitable under stress."

ii. Leveraging Alumni Power

The presentation noted the untapped potential of alumni networks as strategic financial and developmental partners. Professor Lugujjo recommended that universities should establish structured communication channels with graduates, cultivate a culture of giving, and build endowment funds to secure long-term institutional financing. Drawing from global evidence, he noted that universities with strong alumni engagement consistently outperform their peers in funding stability and institutional development.

iii. Income-Generating Enterprises

Another key strategy proposed was the transformation of university assets into productive ventures. Examples included university farms that integrate research, community engagement, and commercial production; teaching hospitals that balance healthcare delivery with training and research; and workshops or consultancy units that provide services to local industries. Citing success stories from Makerere, Kyambogo, Busitema, and private universities such as UCU and KIU, Professor Lugujjo demonstrated how universities across Uganda have leveraged their land, skills, and infrastructure to generate additional income through innovation hubs, rental properties, guest houses, and production units.

iv. Strategic Partnerships and Digital Transformation

Professor Lugujjo hinged on the importance of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and digital transformation as pathways to financial resilience. Through PPPs, universities could collaborate with industry to establish laboratories, research centers, and technology hubs that serve both academic and commercial purposes. He also encouraged the adoption of e-learning and digital platforms to expand access, reduce costs, and maintain educational continuity during disruptions, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a key lesson in institutional adaptability. Furthermore, he advocated for contract research and technical consultancy services as alternative income sources that align academic expertise with national development needs.

vi. Strategic Borrowing for Growth

While cautioning against indiscriminate borrowing, Professor Lugujjo highlighted that when properly managed, loans can be transformative. Several Ugandan universities have successfully used commercial and development finance loans to construct lecture halls, laboratories, teaching hospitals, and student accommodation facilities that generate consistent rental or service income. He emphasized the importance of clear repayment plans and ring-fenced revenue mechanisms to ensure sustainability and avoid debt crises.

v. Strategic Recommendations and the Way Forward

In his closing remarks, Professor Lugujjo presented several strategic recommendations to strengthen university financial resilience. These included institutionalizing financial diversification, developing robust alumni programs, promoting PPPs, investing in technology, enhancing governance and accountability, and nurturing innovation incubators for student and staff-led ventures. He noted that resilience depends not only on raising funds but also on prudent financial stewardship and transparency.

He further, urged universities to move from a survival mindset to one of sustainability, affirming the UVCF's commitment to facilitating knowledge sharing, advocating for supportive government policies, and building institutional capacity in financial management and entrepreneurial leadership. He concluded with a resounding message of hope: *"A university that invests in many streams will never thirst."*

5.1.1 Question and Answer Session

During the discussion that followed Professor Lugujjo's presentation, participants reflected on the need to draw concrete policy issues from the presentation — noting that one of the main purposes of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum conferences is to identify and propose actionable policy considerations for the higher education sector.

A key comment centered on the concept of alumni power. Participants emphasized that for universities to successfully harness the potential of their alumni as partners in development and financing, institutions must first ensure that students have a positive and fulfilling experience during their time at the university. It was observed that alumni engagement and loyalty are largely shaped by the quality of academic, social, and administrative interactions students encounter. Therefore, improving the student experience was underscored as a foundational step toward cultivating a strong and supportive alumni network that can meaningfully contribute to institutional growth and resilience.

5.1.2 Wrap up for day 1 and Networking: Informal Discussions

The day's proceedings concluded with a brief wrap-up session led by the Chair, who commended Professor Lugujjo for his comprehensive and thought-provoking presentation on university financing models for resilience. In the interest of new UVCF members, the Chairperson introduced the new Executive committee elected in February 2025, including: Prof. Paul Waako as Chairperson, Charity Basaza Mulenga as Vice Chairperson, and Prof. Jude Lubega as Treasurer. Other members of the executive are Dr. Mwalimu Musheshe and Dr. Oliver Sabiti.

Participants expressed appreciation for the insightful discussions held throughout the day and acknowledged the relevance of the topics in addressing the financial and operational challenges faced by universities in Uganda.

This was followed by an informal networking session that provided an opportunity for participants to interact freely, exchange ideas, and build on the day's discussions. The atmosphere was collegial and engaging, as Vice Chancellors, university administrators, and other stakeholders shared experiences, explored potential collaborations, and reflected on practical strategies to strengthen institutional sustainability. The networking interactions marked a fitting close to Day 1 of the two-day conference, allowing for the continuation of deliberations on the following day. (some of the Photographs capturing these moments of engagement and informal interaction are included below.)

Figure 13: Some of the participants during Wrap up Networking sessions ending Day 1

DAY 2.

5.1.3 Opening Formalities for Day 2

The session commenced with the observance of the National Anthems. The Chair thereafter called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. This was followed by an opening prayer led by Prof. Ismail Gyagenda - Rector of the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). In his invocation, Prof. Gyagenda thanked God for the gift of life and for granting participants journey mercies to the conference. He further prayed for fruitful and prosperous deliberations as the conference progressed.

5.1.4 Recap & Reflections from Day 1:

The recap session as captured by secretariat was moderated by the Master of Ceremony, Mr. Dennis Lukaaya. He revisited the key highlights from Day 1, beginning with the panel discussion on delivering quality higher education in a challenging economic environment chaired by Professor Edwin Kyamanywa. Reflections centered on the sustainability of current funding models—particularly the strain caused by 62% of public university funding being allocated to wages—and the call for performance-based block grants to enhance research, innovation, and institutional flexibility. The session re-affirmed the need for curriculum reform and stronger industry alignment, including extending internship duration and integrating SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) competencies to strengthen communication, problem-solving, and professional skills.

Figure 14: Prof. Ismail Gyagenda. Leading the Opening prayer for Day 2 of the Conference

Figure 15: Mr. Dennis Lukaaya giving recap for day 1

Discussions further emphasized expanding research funding, deepening community engagement, and supporting homegrown innovations such as Kiira Motors and RENU. Digital transformation remained a key priority, highlighted by RENU's demonstration of secure digital infrastructure and its appeal for wider institutional membership. Governance reform, improved alumni relations, and the inclusion of industry representatives on university councils were also underscored.

Additional reflections pointed to the importance of aligning academic programs with national development priorities, enhancing collaboration across institutions, investing in entrepreneurship and ICT training, and improving research visibility through local open-access journals and the emerging consortium of university librarians.

5.3 Sub-theme 2: Quality Assurance, Financing, and Cost Management in Higher Education – By Dr. Francis Otto, Director of ICT MMU

Figure 16: Dr. Francis Otto giving presentation on Quality Assurance, Financing and cost Management in Higher Education

In his presentation, Dr. Otto indicated a number of issues:

i. **Strengthening quality assurance requires both internal improvement processes and external accountability mechanisms.** He highlighted that internal evaluations focus on continuous improvement through systematic data collection, critical reflection, and action planning. Their effectiveness depends on evaluators' deep understanding of institutional context. External audits complement these efforts by assessing compliance with set standards and assuring stakeholders—including government, funders, parents, and students—of institutional credibility. Whereas quality audits examine the strength of institutional quality management systems, financial audits confirm the accuracy and integrity of financial reporting.

ii. **Financing constraints continue to undermine quality improvements across higher education institutions.** Public universities rely predominantly on government funding, yet the real value of these allocations has declined significantly over the years. With over 90% of university revenues now coming from student fees—and fewer than 10% of Ugandan households earning more than UGX 10 million annually—affordability challenges remain acute. Private universities face even greater vulnerabilities because of their heavy dependence on tuition. These financial pressures constrain staff recruitment and retention, hinder investment in infrastructure, and limit support for research and innovation.

iii. **Delivering quality higher education comes with unavoidable institutional costs that require careful balancing.** Governance and administration, teaching and learning resources, staff development, research production, and community engagement all demand sustained investment. Institutions often struggle to balance these quality demands with limited resources. The presenter emphasized the need for strategic prioritization, ensuring that quality-related functions receive adequate support without compromising institutional financial stability.

iv. **Cost minimization strategies can help maintain quality without overburdening institutions.** Recommended approaches included integrating digital tools into governance and administration, adopting blended learning, and expanding the use of Open Educational Resources (OER). Non-monetary staff incentives—such as mentorship programs and professional collaboration—were highlighted as effective and affordable strategies for enhancing staff motivation. Institutions were further encouraged to share resources, explore cost-effective service options, and leverage digital platforms for collaborative research and publication.

v. **Data-driven quality assurance is essential for effective monitoring and timely intervention.** The presentation emphasized that when technology is aligned with educational goals, it can significantly strengthen quality assurance systems. Real-time data analytics, automated alerts, and mobile-based communication provide opportunities for early detection of challenges and faster responses. However, the presenter stressed the importance of user training, digital literacy, equitable access, and strong safeguards for student data privacy.

vi. **Persistent challenges in curriculum delivery highlight the need for stronger monitoring and enforcement.** The session noted that less than 50% of prescribed course content is typically completed in many programs, reflecting gaps in planning, service stability, and oversight. Effective quality assurance must therefore extend beyond policy development to active implementation supported by consistent documentation, accessible policy and program materials, and strong alignment between institutional mission and practice. Broad stakeholder engagement—including students, staff, alumni, and employers—was emphasized as a cornerstone of an effective quality culture.

vii. **The evolution of Uganda's quality assurance landscape demonstrates the value of collaboration and standardization.** When the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established between 2001, it faced challenges such as limited institutional buy-in and staffing constraints. Through sustained collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building, standardized processes emerged, culminating in the creation of the Quality Assurance Framework (2014). This framework provides clear definitions, regulatory requirements, assessment tools, and quality control measures, alongside infrastructure standards such as the requirement of 2.5 square meters per student in learning spaces.

viii. **Continuous institutional development remains central to ensuring sustainable quality improvements.** The presenter outlined the stages of institutional progression—from provisional licensing to charter status and ongoing charter compliance reporting. Regular monitoring, accreditation processes, external validations, and peer reviews were highlighted as essential mechanisms for ensuring institutions remain aligned with national quality expectations and are accountable to stakeholders.

Overall, the presentation emphasized that achieving and maintaining high-quality higher education in Uganda requires a balanced and integrated approach—one that combines strong quality assurance systems, realistic financing strategies, effective cost management, technological innovation, and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders.

5.3.1 Remarks and Reflections Following the Presentation:

The discussion that followed the presentation generated thoughtful reflections from participants, particularly on the relationship between existing quality assurance structures, internal audit functions, and the broader regulatory ecosystem governing higher education.

i. Participants raised concerns about the perceived overlap between quality assurance and internal audit units within universities, noting that this often creates administrative ambiguity and operational inefficiencies. In response, the presenter clarified that while both functions contribute to institutional accountability, their mandates differ significantly. Internal audits focus primarily on financial transactions, internal controls, risk management, and business process improvement. Internal auditors are typically recruited and developed within the institution, working to strengthen internal compliance and operational efficiency. Conversely, quality assurance has a much broader oversight mandate, extending to admissions practices, academic systems, gender balance considerations, public interest protection, and compliance with statutory regulations. This distinction, the presenter emphasized, helps institutions avoid duplication while ensuring that each function effectively contributes to overall institutional performance.

ii. A related issue concerned the multiplicity of external regulatory bodies—including the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), and various auditing offices—which sometimes creates uncertainty regarding whose authority supersedes the others. Participants questioned how universities should reconcile directives from these different entities. The presenter acknowledged these challenges and highlighted the need for stronger coordination among oversight bodies. Institutions would benefit from clearer task division, improved information sharing—especially of audit findings—and streamlined reporting mechanisms to reduce administrative burden. Specific mention was made of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (PPDA) unit, whose oversight focuses on procurement processes, competitive pricing, and compliance with relevant procurement laws. Improved synergy between these bodies, it was noted, would strengthen oversight while minimizing duplication of effort.

iii. Participants also sought clarification on the new directive governing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) involving financial transactions in government institutions**.** The presenter reiterated that government institutions are now prohibited from entering agreements that involve financial commitments without following proper procurement procedures. All such engagements must demonstrate competitive pricing and adhere strictly to procurement principles. The directive is documented and accessible through official channels, and institutions were encouraged to consult it regularly to ensure compliance.

iv. A notable portion of the discussion focused on the balance between regulatory compliance and the pursuit of innovation in universities. Participants expressed concern that stringent regulations might discourage creativity, pushing institutions to remain conservative rather than developing bold, transformative solutions. The presenter clarified that the existing regulatory framework is intentionally designed to support innovation within reasonable boundaries. Academic freedom remains protected, especially in program design, where institutions have flexibility to integrate unique elements such as religious studies or specialized skills training, provided core requirements are met. Moreover, opportunities for innovation abound in areas such as digital transformation, curriculum reform, and internationalization. The regulatory framework, rather than hindering innovation, seeks to establish minimum standards while giving institutions the autonomy to innovate in ways that enhance quality and competitiveness.

In concluding the session, the presenter emphasized that the balancing act between regulation, quality assurance, internal audit processes, and institutional creativity requires continuous dialogue, shared understanding, and coordinated oversight. By refining governance processes, strengthening collaborative structures, and embracing innovation within the established framework, universities can fulfil their mandate effectively while remaining competitive both locally and internationally.

5.4 Sub-theme 3: Staff Retention & Productivity in Lean Times – presented by Prof. Muhammad Ngoma, Vice Chancellor, Kampala International University (KIU)

In his present, Prof. Ngoma indicated that:

i. **A growing motivation and productivity crisis is affecting universities globally and locally.** Prof. Ngoma underscored the urgent challenge of staff motivation, retention, and productivity, particularly within resource-constrained institutions. He emphasized that although human capital remains the most valuable asset in higher education, widespread demotivation continues to undermine institutional performance, commitment, and engagement. Drawing on both global and local evidence, he highlighted the depth of the crisis and its implications for the effectiveness and competitiveness of universities.

Figure 17: Prof. Muhammad Ngoma, givng his presentation on Staff Retention & Productivity in Lean Times

ii. **Global and Ugandan statistics reveal widespread demotivation and disengagement.** Prof. Ngoma shared compelling data illustrating the seriousness of the motivation deficit among workers worldwide. He noted that 70% of workers globally are demotivated (WEF, 2021), while 87% are not engaged in their jobs (Gallup, 2023). Demotivated workers were shown to underperform by up to 31% (Margit, 2019), negatively affecting overall productivity. In Uganda, only 21% of employees feel motivated at work (Winny et al., 2023), and the State of the Global Workplace 2023 report places Ugandans among the most stressed and least motivated populations in Sub-Saharan Africa. These worrying trends signal the need for urgent institutional interventions.

iii. **Productivity must be assessed holistically across academic and administrative roles.** The presentation stressed that productivity in higher education cannot be viewed narrowly but must reflect the distinct contributions of both academic and administrative staff. For academic personnel, productivity is captured through the quality of learning materials, the level of student engagement, research output, innovation, and community outreach. For administrative and support staff, productivity is demonstrated through effective communication, problem solving, coordination, responsiveness to clients, and sound resource management. Prof. Ngoma emphasized that both categories of staff are indispensable to institutional success and must be supported equitably.

iv. **Motivation is driven by supportive environments, while demotivation stems from poor conditions.** Prof. Ngoma presented evidence showing that staff motivation is largely shaped by the work environment. Supportive organizational cultures, recognition and appreciation, fair compensation, and opportunities to do meaningful work were identified as key motivators. Positive peer relationships and supportive management also contribute significantly to engagement and retention. Conversely, poor pay, lack of appreciation, toxic workplace cultures, workplace politics, limited career progression, and rigid or abusive supervision were cited as the leading reasons staff leave universities. Many of these push factors, he noted, are preventable through improved institutional policies and leadership practices.

v. **Strengthening staff retention requires leadership reform, inclusivity, and healthier workplaces.** In concluding his presentation, Prof. Ngoma called for deliberate reforms to strengthen staff motivation and retention. He recommended the adoption of transformational leadership approaches that inspire, empower, and support staff. Practical strategies such as Management by Walking Around (MBWA) were proposed to enhance managerial visibility and communication. He further emphasized the importance of effective feedback mechanisms, inclusive decision-making processes, and the balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through recognition, rewards, and supportive welfare schemes. Detoxifying the work environment and promoting a positive, growth-oriented culture were highlighted as essential conditions for fostering long-term staff happiness, productivity, and institutional resilience.

5.5 Sub-theme 4: Collaborative Survival: Sharing Resources – by Prof. Jackson Majaliwa Mwanjalolo, - RUFORUM

Professor Jackson Majaliwa Mwanjalolo delivered an insightful presentation on “Collaborative Survival: Sharing Resources,” highlighting the importance of inter-institutional partnerships and collective resource utilization as key strategies for enhancing the resilience of higher education institutions in Africa.

Drawing on experiences from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Bank-supported initiatives in Southern Africa, he illustrated the power of collaboration and shared infrastructure in overcoming systemic challenges within the higher education sector in more ways than one:

i. Lessons from the African Centers of Excellence Program

Professor Majaliwa shared practical examples from the African Centers of Excellence (ACE) Program, supported by the World Bank across six African countries, including Malawi and Mozambique.

In Malawi, resources were distributed among five programs across three universities, with each center of excellence receiving USD 5 million. The initiative yielded impressive results—over 300 faculty and PhD exchanges, 780 new students trained, 35 accredited programs, and 75 Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed.

He explained that the ACE Program operates on a modified planetary system model, where a leading university builds capacity and resources for others in its orbit. The program is structured around four main components: enhancing regional networks, establishing research populations, mobilizing resources, and creating business integration centers. It focuses on six priority areas—innovation and economic development, policy analysis, statistics and foresight, agribusiness and entrepreneurship, agriculture, and risk management with spatial development.

ii. Achievements and Regional Outcomes

The program has significantly improved research capacity across partner institutions, as demonstrated by increased publication output, cross-university training, and strengthened collaborations. A regional agricultural policy framework is currently under development, with a validation workshop planned to cover East and Southern Africa. The framework aims to link research, policy, and education to support evidence-based decision-making.

In terms of resource mobilization and grant success, Professor Majaliwa reported that for 2024, RUFORUM institutions secured four out of nine Inter-Africa Mobility Projects, three Erasmus Projects, and two Horizon Projects. A regional workshop is scheduled to take place in Botswana from January 5th to 30th 2026, with 76 teams preparing proposals for submission early next year.

iii. Development of Incubation Centers

Another notable achievement was the establishment of 90 incubation centers, surpassing the initial target of 30. Professor Majaliwa cited Ghana as a case study, where three centers of excellence were merged into one interdisciplinary incubation center. Although progress in Ghana has been gradual, it demonstrated how cross-disciplinary collaboration can strengthen innovation ecosystems and enhance institutional impact.

iv. Recommendations for Ugandan Universities

Drawing from the regional experience, Professor Majaliwa urged Ugandan universities to adopt similar collaborative models to strengthen institutional capacity and financial sustainability. He recommended practical mechanisms such as joint facilities sharing, inter-institutional programs, student exchange initiatives, and graduate teaching assistantship programs. For these collaborations to succeed, he emphasized the need for strong institutional partnerships, clear governance structures, adequate funding, shared objectives, and effective technology and infrastructure utilization.

5.5.1 Reactions and Observations from participants

During the plenary discussion, participants expressed keen interest in joining the RUFORUM network**.**

i. It was clarified that the process is straightforward—universities can apply by writing to the RUFORUM Executive Secretary, accompanied by an annual membership fee of USD 5,000, with formal responses provided during the network's Annual General Meeting in December.
ii. Participants also noted that to maximize its influence and ensure sustainability, RUFORUM should seek entry into elite international consortia and strategic alliances. This would enable the organization to tap into larger funding streams, especially in light of the World Bank's gradual withdrawal from higher education financing. Additionally, the forum called for increased government investment in research and innovation, arguing that national funding support is essential to reduce dependence on external donors and promote home-grown solutions.

5.6 Presentation from Academia - Digital Transformation: By Mr. Arpit Badjatya, Sero soft Solutions

Mr. Arpit Badjatya, **Founder and CEO of *Academia by Serosoft*,** delivered an engaging presentation on the transformative potential of digital technologies in reshaping higher education in Uganda. He began by acknowledging that while education remains one of the most powerful tools for social transformation, technology has become an equally powerful catalyst for revolutionizing the education sector.

His presentation explored how digital transformation—anchored in automation, data-driven decision-making, and innovation—can drive efficiency, accountability, and growth across Uganda's higher education landscape.

The State of Uganda's Higher Education and EdTech Growth

Mr. Badjatya highlighted that Uganda's higher education sector has experienced steady expansion, with over 50 fully accredited public and private universities. However, this growth comes with new demands for automation, digital governance, and quality assurance. He observed that institutions are increasingly adopting student information systems (SIS), learning management systems (LMS), and virtual learning platforms to meet rising expectations for transparency and efficiency. Post-COVID-19 realities have further accelerated universities' shift toward digital tools in admissions, teaching, and student services

Figure 19: Mr. Arpit Badjatya, Founder and CEO of Academia - Serosoft Solutions

. He also noted the National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) growing emphasis on digital compliance and data-driven institutional management as part of accreditation processes. He further highlighted a number of issues including:

i. Driving Digital Transformation in Universities

It was explained that universities in Uganda are now embracing digital solutions to streamline administration, enhance the student experience, and enable data-informed planning. He identified three major drivers of this transformation—growing digital adoption, institutional willingness to innovate, and emerging opportunities for transformation—including automation of processes, personalized learning, and predictive analytics. These, he said, are now critical priorities for modern universities seeking to remain competitive and resilient.

ii. Introducing Academia by Serosoft

Presenting *Academia by Serosoft* as a comprehensive digital platform, Mr. Badjatya described it as a robust, AI-powered, cloud-based student information system designed to automate and integrate all core university operations. The software supports over 40 functional modules covering admissions, academic management, examinations, finance, human resources, alumni relations, and analytics. Its key features include high configurability, interoperability with other systems, scalability for multi-campus institutions, mobile readiness, and real-time data dashboards. He emphasized that the system's architecture supports process standardization, transparency, and improved institutional productivity while reducing data redundancy.

iii. Advanced Analytics, Security, and AI-Driven Innovation

A key highlight of the presentation was Academia's use of artificial intelligence to enhance efficiency and decision-making. The system integrates AI-based analytics, personalized student assistants, automated remark generation for mark sheets, and predictive reporting tools. These features enable administrators and faculty to monitor student performance, manage attendance, track fees, and forecast trends in academic outcomes. The solution also meets international data protection and quality standards, being GDPR compliant, ISO certified, and Vulnerability Assessment and Penetration Testing (VAPT) certified—ensuring secure and reliable data management.

iv. Implementation, Support, and Continuous Improvement

The presenter explained that *Serosoft* employs a structured implementation process encompassing planning, configuration, testing, training, and ongoing support. The company invests 30% of its annual revenue in product research and development, ensuring continuous innovation and alignment with evolving trends in higher education technology. He also emphasized *Serosoft's* global presence, operating in over 30 countries and serving more than one million learners and educators across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States.

v. Case Studies and Global Impact

The presentation featured successful case studies from both African and international institutions, including Ndejje University and King Ceasor University in Uganda, which have benefited from streamlined administrative processes, improved data-driven decision-making, and enhanced student engagement. Other examples were drawn from institutions such as Stellenbosch University (South Africa), Botho University (Botswana), and the Open University of Mauritius—all of which reported improved operational efficiency, governance, and scalability through digital transformation.

vi. Concluding Reflections

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Badjatya reaffirmed that technology is not merely a support tool but a strategic enabler of educational transformation. He encouraged Ugandan universities to embrace digital platforms as a pathway to greater institutional agility, efficiency, and sustainability. He reiterated that the future of higher education lies in creating digitally empowered institutions capable of leveraging data, artificial intelligence, and automation to deliver quality education at scale.

The presentation was well received, with participants acknowledging the relevance of digital transformation to Uganda's higher education context and the opportunities it presents for institutional growth, innovation, and global competitiveness.

5.6.1 Appreciation and Exhibition Engagement

During the session, Serosoft Technologies took a moment to express heartfelt appreciation to the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum (UVCF) Secretariat, through Professor Eriabu Lugujjo, for the continued support and collaboration extended to the company. This gesture underscored the strong partnership between UVCF and Serosoft in advancing digital transformation initiatives within Uganda's higher education sector.

Participants were further encouraged to visit the Serosoft exhibition table for more detailed demonstrations and one-on-one interactions with the technical team. The exhibition provided an opportunity for universities to explore customized digital solutions tailored to their institutional needs and to engage directly with the Serosoft representatives for further discussions on implementation and collaboration.

Figure 20: UVCF Executive Director receiving a token of appreciation from Serosoft Solutions

5.7 Presentation by Arxia Company: Digital Student Journeys- A Blueprint to Engage, Support and Manage Effectively

The presentation by ARXIA Company provided an in-depth look at how digital transformation can significantly enhance efficiency, student engagement, and institutional management in higher education. ARXIA—a global digital transformation firm operating across Europe, Africa, and Latin America, including a permanent presence in Uganda—specializes in delivering secure, scalable, and interoperable solutions tailored to the unique needs of universities and public sector institutions. It was mentioned that the company combines consulting expertise, software engineering, and technical capacity building to help institutions modernize their operations and achieve strategic digital maturity in a number through its numerous tailor made approaches. The presenter further mentioned a few salient issues about Arxia:

Figure 21:Representative from Arxia giving presentation on Digital Student Journeys

i. Sector-wide experience hence ability to deliver context-specific solutions. ARXIA's work spans several key sectors, including public governance, higher education, digital ecosystem development, the financial sector, mining, and social support services. In each area, the company focuses on context-specific solutions that promote efficiency and improve service delivery. In the higher education sector, ARXIA partners with universities to provide digital infrastructure that supports both administrative functions and student-centered services. Their offerings include modular university management platforms, integrated purchasing systems, and AI-enabled automation tools designed to simplify workflows, enhance institutional accountability, and improve the student experience.

ii. Global footprint illustrating adaptability and credibility.
ARXIA's international footprint is extensive, with engagements in Uganda, Senegal, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Chile, Peru, Burundi, Somalia, the Central African Republic, Romania, Zambia, and Tunisia. Its client base includes major development institutions such as the World Bank and the UN International Trade Centre, as well as prominent universities like the University of Medicine and Pharmacy Bucharest and the University of Lima. These wide-ranging engagements demonstrate the company's ability to adapt digital transformation strategies to diverse policy environments and sectoral needs.

iii. The growing urgency of digitalization in African higher education.
ARXIA highlighted that digitalization is increasingly necessary as competition intensifies—with over 50 accredited institutions in Uganda and more than 120 in Kenya. The company emphasized that digital transformation directly improves student engagement, accelerates administrative processes, strengthens institutional visibility, and enhances graduate employability. To guide universities through this process, ARXIA introduced the Digital Student Journey Framework, which maps the entire student lifecycle—from discovery and application to study progression and alumni engagement—ensuring that digital tools add value at every stage.

iv. Key digital tools that support an effective student journey.
ARXIA first emphasized the role of a strategically designed institutional website as the gateway for prospective students, guiding them through the four stages of Discover, Trust, Decide, and Apply. The company stressed the importance of secure technology, mobile-friendly design, and AI-assisted engagement to strengthen recruitment. Second, the Digital Student Dashboard was presented as a centralized platform offering real-time information on admissions, academic progress, financial status, and scheduling. The dashboard enhances transparency for students while enabling staff to benefit from role-based access, standardized workflows, and improved accountability.

V. Student Management System (SMS) that serve as a secure and integrated operational backbone.
At the operational level, the company highlighted its Student Management System, which integrates biographical data, enrollment records, academic performance, and institutional analytics within a secure, unified platform. This system links seamlessly with existing university technologies, supporting efficient decision-making and safeguarding the integrity of student records.

vi. Quick-value implementation approach to sustain institutional momentum.
To support implementation, the company described its "quick value" approach, which ensures visible improvements within the first 90 days. Through strategic alignment sessions, pilot deployments, and phased scaling, universities can maintain momentum and build stakeholder enthusiasm. ARXIA emphasized measurable progress through key indicators such as website bounce rates, self-service success rates, and administrative cycle times.

vii. **Digital architecture that balances standardization with institutional autonomy.**
The company explained that its digital architecture provides common infrastructure for cost efficiency, joint innovation, and robust security, while preserving institutional flexibility. This ensures that universities retain full control over their branding, strategic priorities, and internal processes, allowing collaboration without compromising autonomy.

In closing, ARXIA urged universities to move decisively in advancing their digital transformation agendas. The presenter reiterated that ARXIA does not sell software but offers problem-solving approaches tailored to the evolving challenges of higher education. Early adopters were encouraged to leverage shared digital solutions, pursue quick wins, and position their institutions competitively within the rapidly evolving higher education environment.

5.7.1 Session Reflections and Responses Following the Presentation by ARXIA

The discussion that followed the presentation centered on critical questions related to data standardization, institutional diversity, data ownership, security of classified information, and copyright considerations in digital transformation processes within universities. Participants expressed concern about how digital systems can accommodate the unique characteristics of public and private institutions, protect sensitive information, and maintain institutional autonomy over academic data and research outputs:

i. **Balancing Standardization with Institutional Diversity**
Participants raised an important question on how standardization would be achieved across universities that possess inherently unique structures, organizational cultures, and operational models. ARXIA clarified that standardization does not imply uniformity of interfaces or processes, but rather the establishment of a structured data management strategy that improves governance. The focus is on harmonized data models, interoperability standards, and secure API frameworks, while preserving each institution's distinct systems and workflows. They emphasized that sensitive or confidential information remains protected, as standardization concerns the *management*—not the *exposure*—of data.

ii. **Addressing Differences Between Public and Private Universities**
Concerns were also raised about the operational constraints characteristic of public universities, particularly the limited flexibility in procurement processes due to government regulations. This often affects service delivery timelines and engagement with digital service providers. ARXIA acknowledged these realities and highlighted their extensive experience working with both public and private universities across 10 African countries, including Uganda. Their approach involves modular, step-by-step digital transformation, supported by change management strategies that allow institutions to progress within their constraints while still achieving meaningful innovation.

iii. **Data Ownership, Control, and Vendor Relations**
Participants expressed worry about scenarios where delays in payment—especially in public institutions—may lead service providers to withhold access to student data. ARXIA stressed that under their model, data ownership unequivocally belongs to the institution, not the system or the vendor. Their frameworks emphasize digital sovereignty, secure data management, and the establishment of clear data-sharing policies that ensure institutions retain full control regardless of operational challenges. They promote procurement arrangements that are both affordable and aligned with institutional payment processes.

iv. **Managing Classified Information in Public Institutions**
Questions were raised about working with public institutions where certain information is classified. ARXIA responded that their digital transformation model integrates robust confidentiality protocols, ethical AI

principles, and strict access control systems tailored to different categories of institutional data. Their strategy includes secure infrastructure, role-based permissions, and alignment with national data protection standards to safeguard classified or sensitive information throughout the digitalization process.

v. Copyright, Research Outputs, and Academic Publishing

Given that universities are centres for research and publication, participants sought clarity on how ARXIA handles copyright issues, particularly when their systems manage or store academic materials. The company clarified that their knowledge management and AI-powered platforms are designed to support classification, coordination, and access to institutional knowledge, while fully respecting copyright and intellectual property rights. Their model ensures that academic outputs remain the property of the institution and the authors, with digital systems serving only as enablers for organization, retrieval, and preservation.

vi. ARXIA's Comprehensive Digital Transformation Model

In summarizing their approach, ARXIA reiterated that they offer more than software—they deliver strategic digital transformation consultancy. Their support encompasses three layers: converting analog processes to digital formats, digitalizing existing activities for efficiency, and implementing advanced digital tools to enhance operations. Their solutions include university management systems, procurement management tools, micro-certification systems, and AI-driven automation for administration and student services. The company is also globally engaged, supporting major institutions such as UN agencies and universities worldwide.

vii. Enhancing Digital Presence and User Engagement

Lastly, ARXIA highlighted their capacity to build modern, AI-enabled university websites that improve student engagement and institutional visibility. These websites integrate secure infrastructure, mobile-friendly features, accessibility elements, and seamless connection to student service platforms. They emphasized that digital presence is a central pillar of strengthening competitiveness and attracting both local and international students.

5.8 Summary of Key Take-Home Points from All presentations

Theme / Session	Key Take-Home Points
1. Quality Education in a Constrained Economy (Day 1)	i. Quality higher education requires innovation, efficiency, and collaboration despite economic constraints. ii. Quality must be viewed holistically across government, industry, and academia. iii. Adoption of the "Triple Helix + Society" model is essential for relevance and impact.
2. Funding and Sustainability (Day 1)	i. Current funding models are unsustainable; 62% of public university budgets go to wages. ii. Need for performance-based block grants and greater institutional autonomy. iii. Expand tax incentives, research funding, and student loan schemes to include private universities and TVET programs.

	iv. Endowment funds should be developed as long-term financing instruments.
3. Curriculum Reform and Industry Alignment (Day 1)	i. Curricula must be realigned to industry and community needs using competency-based models. ii. The 8-week internship is inadequate; structured, longer apprenticeship programs are needed. iii. Adopt STEAM—integrating arts into STEM—to enhance innovation and creativity. iv. Strengthen communication, report-writing, and problem-solving skills across all disciplines.
4. Research, Innovation, and Industrial Linkages (Day 1)	i. Research funding should be inclusive of private universities and tied to community impact. ii. Universities should prioritize innovation and development of homegrown technologies. iii. Priority areas include battery technology, e-mobility, and digital transformation—Kiira Motors as a model. iv. UVCF should coordinate the Triple Helix partnerships nationally.
5. Digital Connectivity and Transformation (Day 1)	i. RENU remains vital for digital learning and research support. ii. EDUROAM is now available in 15 universities and in off-campus student hostels. iii. Universities should subscribe to RENU to access shared digital resources and enhance collaboration.
6. Governance, Leadership, and Institutional Positioning (Day 1)	i. Institutions must define unique niches instead of duplicating programs (e.g., proliferation of BBAs). ii. Governance should adopt business-minded approaches focused on efficiency and accountability. iii. Councils should integrate private sector members for strategic relevance. iv. Alumni engagement must be strengthened for institutional growth.
7. Equity, Access, and Enrollment (Day 1)	i. Uganda's higher education enrollment ratio stands at 5%—requiring deliberate actions to expand access. ii. Programs must respond to national priorities and cultural contexts. iii. Staff motivation, particularly in humanities and arts, is essential for quality delivery.
8. Collaboration over Competition (Day 1)	i. Universities should collaborate rather than compete—sharing infrastructure, expertise, and innovation hubs. ii. Industry partners such as Axia Co. and Kiira Motors expressed readiness for joint innovations. iii. Collaboration is key to reducing duplication and enhancing efficiency.
9. Digital Transformation in Higher Education – Serosoft "Academia" ERP (Day 2)	i. The Academia ERP manages the full student lifecycle using AI and automation. ii. Rapid implementation within 7 months; customizable and cloud-based. iii. Enhances transparency, efficiency, data integrity, and decision-making. iv. Institutions should ensure full ownership and control of their data.
10. Digital Transformation – ARXIA Digital Solutions (Day 2)	i. ARXIA provides strategic, AI-enabled digital transformation rather than generic software.

	ii. Promotes interoperability—linking existing systems instead of replacing them. iii. Encourages "quick wins" within 90 days to maintain momentum. iv. Emphasizes digital sovereignty, privacy, and robust data governance. v. Goal: Build resilient digital ecosystems to enhance learning and operational efficiency.
11. Quality Assurance, Regulation, and Cost Management – Dr. Francis Otto (Day 2)	i. Internal QA should promote academic improvement; external QA ensures compliance. ii. Less than 50% of course content is delivered—highlighting monitoring gaps. iii. Technology should be used for real-time tracking and evidence-based teaching. iv. Clear distinction needed between QA and internal audit roles. v. Regulations must safeguard innovation and academic freedom. vi. Resource sharing, blended learning, and OERs can reduce operational costs.
12. Staff Retention and Productivity in Lean Times – Prof. Muhammad Ngoma (Day 2)	i. 70% of staff globally are demotivated; 87% disengaged—similar trends in Uganda. ii. Motivation drives productivity; demotivation reduces performance by up to 30%. iii. Retention depends on supportive leadership, recognition, growth pathways, and healthy work environments. iv. Transformational leadership, open communication, inclusivity, and fair rewards are key. v. Positive institutional culture is essential for stability and productivity.
13. Collaborative Survival and Resource Sharing – Prof. Jackson Majaliwa (Day 2)	i. Universities should collaborate and share resources rather than compete. ii. RUFORUM membership requires a formal request and annual fee of USD 5,000. iii. RUFORUM encouraged to build global partnerships for large-scale funding. iv. Ugandan universities should actively pursue national research funding opportunities.

6.0 Closing Remarks

The closing session of the 14th Annual Conference of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum (UVCF) was marked by expressions of gratitude, recognition of collective effort, and reaffirmation of commitments toward strengthening Uganda's higher education sector.

6.1 Vote of Thanks – Prof. Eriabu Lugujjo

Prof. Eriabu Lugujjo offered the first vote of thanks, extending warm appreciation to all participants for their contribution to the success of the two-day conference. He introduced the representative of the Honourable Minister of State for Higher Education, **Mr. Timothy Ssejoba**, who would later deliver the Minister's closing speech.

Prof. Lugujjo also took a moment to recognize the UVCF Secretariat team, acknowledging the extensive background work they executed to ensure the smooth organization and running of the conference.

Figure 22: The UVCF Secretariat

6.2 Vote of Thanks and Special Announcements – UVCF Chairperson

The Chairperson of UVCF then delivered a comprehensive vote of thanks, appreciating the dedication and active engagement of all Vice Chancellors, presenters, moderators, and delegates from both academia and industry. He applauded the presenters for their insightful contributions and thanked key partners and funders—including UVCF, RENU, Victoria University, Bank of Uganda, and Stanbic Bank—for their support in making the conference possible.

In his remarks, the Chairperson issued two important announcements:

1. **Lira University** graciously offered to host the next Annual UVCF Conference in **October 2026**.
2. The **next Quarterly Meeting of Vice Chancellors** will be held in the last two weeks of **January 2026 at Uganda Christian University (UCU) Mukono**, with the exact date to be communicated in due course.

Following his announcements, the Chairperson invited the representative of the Honourable Minister to officially close the conference.

6.3 Official Closing– Remarks by Mr. Timothy Ssejjoba

Mr. Timothy Ssejoba, speaking on behalf of the Honourable Minister of State for Higher Education, first conveyed the Minister's apologies for being unable to attend in person. He then proceeded to read the Minister's prepared closing speech.

Figure 23: Mr. Timothy Musoke Ssejjoba giving conference closing Remarks

Closing Speech from the Hon. Minister of State for Higher Education

The Chairperson of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum
Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors'
Heads of Higher Education Institutions
Directors and Deans
Distinguished academics and scholars,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.
It is with great honor and a profound sense of responsibility that I stand before you today to bring the curtains down on this pivotal 2025 Annual Conference of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum. The energy, intellectual rigor, and collaborative spirit that have characterized these past few days are a testament to your unwavering commitment to our nation's future.

Let me begin by expressing the government's deepest appreciation to each one of you – the Vice Chancellors, institutional leaders, and your dedicated teams. You are the stewards of our nation's intellectual capital. The tremendous work you are doing in ensuring the provision of higher education, even in the midst of significant challenges – from global economic headwinds to local resource constraints – does not go unnoticed. You are nurturing the doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, teachers, and leaders who will propel Uganda forward. For this, our nation is eternally grateful.

The theme of this conference, "Delivering Quality Higher Education in a Challenging Economic Environment," is not just timely; it is the central dilemma of our time. It strikes at the very heart of the trade – offs we must navigate. How to expand access without compromising quality, and how to ensure relevance in a world of rapid change, all while fiscal space remains constrained.

I have listened keenly to the deliberations and recommendations emerging from this forum. I want to assure you that your voices have been heard. Your concerns and innovative proposals are central to the future we are building together.

In direct response to these challenges, I wish to highlight a key government intervention. The draft National Higher Education policy, which is currently in its final stages of consultation, will address itself squarely to the critical issues of the university financing model, quality Assurance, and the cost of education.

We recognize that the current financing model is strained. The new policy will explore sustainable, diversified, and innovative financing mechanisms. This includes a serious look at public-private partnerships, enhanced efficiency in resource utilization, and models that incentivize institutions to generate internal revenue without burdening the students and parents. Alongside financing, the policy will strengthen the framework for quality assurance to ensure that every graduate, from every institution meets the highest standards of excellence and is equipped with the skills for the 21st century economy.

This policy is not being developed in a vacuum. It is intricately linked to our national development compass. Our vision is clearly articulated in the National Development Plan IV (NDP IV) and is further crystallised in the NRM Manifesto for 2026 – 2031. These documents chart an ambitious course for our nation, focusing on sustainable growth, industrialization, and socio – economic transformation.

In particular, NDP IV places a sharp focus on its Human Capital Development Program, which lays out a clear mandate for you, our leaders in higher education. This program requires us to move beyond mere credentialing to a system of purposeful skills development. Specifically, it demands that we:

i. Radically enhance the relevance and quality of education at all levels, with a direct focus on equipping graduates with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) competencies, digital literacy, and critical soft skills.
ii. Foster a culture of innovation, research, and development by strengthening the linkages between academia, industry, and research institutions. The goal is to solve local problems and create marketable products and services.
iii. Increase the availability of a skilled, competitive, and adaptable workforce ready to meet the specific labour demands of our strategic sectors, such as agro – industrialization, tourism, minerals, oil and gas, and the digital economy.
iv. Prioritize entrepreneurship education to ensure our graduates are not only job seekers but, more importantly, job creaters who can establish and grow small and medium enterprises. This is the clear mandate from our national plan. It is further amplified by the aspirations of the NRM Manifesto 2016 – 2031, which seeks to deepen this transformation.

And the core of this transformation is the 10 – fold growth strategy. this is not a mere aspiration; it is a national imperative. And let me be unequivocal: our universities are not just beneficiaries of this growth; you are the primary engines for its realization.

You have a critical, non- negotiable role to play in aligning with this NDP IV mandate.

- ✓ In Human capital development: you must be factories that produce the human capital NDP IV calls for – graduates with not just certificates, but with the competencies to drive our key sectors.
- ✓ In research and innovation: the 10 old growth will be powered by homegrown solutions. Our universities must lead in the applied research that NDP IV prioritizes addressing our specific challenges and bring the gap between the laboratory and the market.
- ✓ In partnership with Industry: We urge you to deepen your collaborations with the private sector to ensure that curricula are directly relevant and that our graduates are the skilled, competitive workforce the economy needs.
- ✓ Funding of UVCF: In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the government's commitment to supporting the higher education sector. We are your partners. We understand that investing in you is an investment in Uganda's sovereignty, prosperity and dignity.

  The journey ahead is demanding, but as this conference has demonstrated, we are not short of ideas, dedication or will. Let us leave this place with renewed sense of purpose, fortified by the partnerships we have strengthened and guided by the clear path set by our national development agenda.

  The government will walk this path with you. Together, let us deliver a higher education system that is not only quality- driven and sustainable but also the undeniable catalyst for the Uganda we all envision – a prosperous, secure, and modern nation.

In his final remarks, the Minister encouraged delegates to leave the conference with renewed purpose, strengthened partnerships, and a shared resolve to transform Uganda's higher education system into a catalyst for national prosperity. He then officially declared the 2025 Annual Conference of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum closed**.**

7.0 Resolutions from the 14th UVCF Conference:

The resolutions presented in this section reflect the collective insights, commitments, and strategic priorities emerging from the 14th Annual Conference of the Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum (UVCF), held under the theme *"Delivering Quality Higher Education in a Challenging Economic Environment."* Over the two-day engagement, Vice Chancellors, institutional leaders, policymakers, industry partners, and other stakeholders deliberated on the pressing issues shaping Uganda's higher education landscape.

The discussions highlighted the urgent need for innovative approaches to quality assurance, sustainable financing, digital transformation, staff motivation, research advancement, and collaborative partnerships. Delegates also explored practical solutions for strengthening institutional resilience, enhancing relevance to industry and national priorities, and expanding equitable access to higher education. The resolutions that follow present a consolidated summary of the key decisions and commitments agreed upon during the conference.

1. Strengthening Quality Education in a Constrained Economy

Universities resolved to adopt innovative, efficient, and collaborative approaches to safeguard quality amidst economic challenges. Members endorsed the Triple Helix + Society model to deepen cooperation among government, academia, industry, and communities, ensuring relevance and resilience in higher education delivery.

2. Reforming University Funding and Promoting Financial Sustainability

The Conference called for comprehensive reforms to Uganda's higher education financing model. Delegates recommended performance-based grants, tax incentives, diversified revenue streams, alumni endowments, and sustainable public–private partnerships. The student loan scheme should be expanded to cover learners in private universities and TVET programs to improve access and equity.

3. Advancing Curriculum Reform and Strengthening Industry Alignment

Universities committed to realigning curricula with industry and societal needs by adopting competency-based and cooperative education models. Consideration should be made to lengthen internship period to support deeper practical learning. Delegates further resolved to adopt STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) to nurture creativity and innovation across disciplines.

4. Enhancing Research, Innovation, and Technological Advancement

Research funding should be inclusive of private universities and directed toward projects with community and national development impact. Institutions were encouraged to prioritize innovation in areas such as e-mobility, battery technology, and digital transformation. UVCF will coordinate Triple Helix partnerships to strengthen national research ecosystems and industrial linkages.

5. Promoting Digital Transformation, Data Governance, and Connectivity

Universities resolved to strengthen digital infrastructure, adopt secure cloud-based systems, and embrace interoperable digital solutions that support institutional efficiency and data integrity. Members were encouraged to join RENU to enhance access to digital research resources and inclusive online learning.

6. Strengthening Quality Assurance through Technology and Regulatory Alignment

Participating institutions agreed to reinforce internal quality assurance for academic improvement and utilize technology-based tools for real-time monitoring of teaching and learning. Universities resolved to clarify the distinction between QA and internal audit functions and foster closer collaboration with NCHE and other regulators to enhance oversight efficiency. Adoption of blended learning and Open Educational Resources (OERs) was said to be a cost-effective strategy to maintain quality.

7. Improving Governance, Institutional Positioning, and Leadership Practices

Institutions were urged to define clear strategic niches, avoid duplication of programs, and adopt business-minded governance approaches that promote efficiency, accountability, and innovation. Delegates emphasized the inclusion of private sector expertise on University Councils and the strengthening of alumni networks as key pillars for institutional growth and sustainability.

8. Expanding Equity, Access, and Enrollment in Higher Education
With national enrollment still at 5%, universities resolved to widen access by developing inclusive, context-relevant programs aligned with national development priorities. Delegates also emphasized the need to motivate and support academic staff—especially in underfunded humanities and arts disciplines—to sustain quality delivery.

9. Strengthening Staff Motivation, Retention, and Productivity
The Conference acknowledged the growing global and national challenge of staff demotivation and agreed on the need for transformational leadership, supportive management practices, and inclusive governance. Institutions resolved to enhance staff welfare, recognition, career development pathways, and healthy work environments that promote psychological safety and productivity.

10. Fostering Collaboration Over Competition for Institutional Sustainability
Universities were encouraged to collaborate rather than compete, sharing infrastructure, expertise, and innovation spaces to reduce duplication and enhance collective capacity. The Conference recognized partnerships with private sector agencies—including technology firms and industry leaders—as critical for advancing innovation, skilling, and institutional sustainability.

11. Deepening Regional and Global Research Partnerships
The Conference encouraged universities to engage actively in regional research networks such as RUFORUM and to explore global partnerships for large-scale funding. Institutions committed to participating in national research funding mechanisms to build sustainable research capacity and support sector-wide development.

Closing Statement
In conclusion, the conference provided a timely and insightful platform for higher education leaders, experts, and stakeholders to collectively reflect on the emerging challenges and opportunities shaping the sector. The discussions, presentations, and recommendations generated throughout the sessions emphasized the critical need for collaboration, innovation, and resilience in strengthening the quality and relevance of higher education in Uganda. As institutions move forward, the outcomes of this conference serve as a valuable guide for informed decision-making, policy development, and strategic action. The Uganda Vice Chancellors' Forum remains committed to supporting member universities in translating these deliberations into measurable progress and sustaining the momentum established during this engagement.