A section of science teachers have backed the move to allow arts students to enrol for science degrees. According to the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), through the Higher Education Certificate (HEC), arts students after A-level will be able to enrol for science courses at any university in the country.

The certificate programme was launched last week by NCHE in Kyambogo, a city suburb. The programme was designed by NCHE in partnership with the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) and the MasterCard Foundation. Samuel Okong, a biology teacher at Kololo Senior Secondary School, says the move was long overdue. He argues that since sciences are compulsory at O-level, students already have some basic knowledge.

Isaac Habumugisha, a physics lecturer at Kabale University, also backed the move. Habumugisha, an author of mathematics and physics textbooks, says universities often have the entry points for science courses and a number of students are left out. The two made the remarks on Friday during an interview with New Vision at the Uganda Museum.

This was shortly after a conference by authors under the Uganda pamphlets Academic and Non-Fiction Authors Association.

How HEC works
According to the programme manual, HEC has been designed such that students with arts subject combinations can be re-oriented for a year in sciences. The programme, also known as Higher Education Access Certificate, is a bridging course for both arts and science courses at universities. It is designed with assumption that the applicant has some basic knowledge of the subjects for which they are being bridged.

According to the HEC programme manual, it will enable students to cross from either sciences to arts courses and vice versa. This is done for purposes of admission into science-based undergraduate programmes at universities and other tertiary institutions. For instance, students who are currently studying history, economics, geography (HEC) takes combination can enrol for HEC programme in physical sciences.

After one year, the arts student would qualify for an undergraduate course such as a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

While at the launch, Prof. Mat Okwakol, the executive director of NCHE, said HEC is one of the avenues designed to increase enrolment and also attract girls in science courses.

"We want the higher education system to be flexible, when someone can enrol for arts or sciences," he said.