



CAEL Series for Entrepreneurship and Leadership Development in Africa

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**“Sustaining best practices in higher institutions: funding, quality assurance and
administration”**

Executive Summary

The Higher Education (HE) sector in Africa has expanded dramatically over the past decade, just as the 18-23 age group is projected to grow by more than 50% by the year 2030. Amid deregulation of the sector, significant increase in the numbers of public and private providers, and rising enrolment, there are growing concerns about falling standards and graduate employability. This training was designed in response to these challenges. Participants were drawn from senior executives of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, and the rest of Africa, quality assurance process has been hampered by the preponderance of unaccredited organisations who offer certificates and diplomas for a fee. There is therefore a critical need to improve system-wide quality monitoring and evaluation in the HE sector in Africa and Nigerian in particular. This can be achieved through adequate funding, guarantee of autonomy, overall reform of institutional administrations, and capacity building in quality assurance.

The workshop explored the following topics, among others: Overview of UK Quality Assurance and Current Audit Processes; Developing & Sustaining Quality Assurance in a Higher Education Environment; University of Wolverhampton Internationalisation; Knowledge Exchange and the Enterprising University; Management and Administration of Human Resources; Research, Innovation & Enterprise Support – Generating New Income; Business Engagement & income Generation; Quality assurance in the UK: principles, processes and issues.

The training recommends, among others, that Nigeria and other African countries should focus more attention on capacity building and funding for the national agencies responsible for oversight of quality assurance.



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Introduction

After decades of almost exclusive focus on primary education, and in the light of considerable economic growth recently witnessed by African countries, there is a renewed call for stakeholders and partners around the world to focus on the role of Africa's higher education sector in producing highly skilled workforce that will drive the region's economic transformation. The Higher Education sector has expanded dramatically in the past decade, during which enrolment has more than doubled from 2.3 million to well over 5 million new intakes. Nevertheless there are pressing concerns about the capacity of universities and higher institutions to provide the right standards of education and produce the right types of graduates suitable for the 21st century work place. This training, which held in July 2012, is a response to this urgent need for capacity building and quality assurance in Africa's HE sector. Participants were drawn from senior management of universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in Africa.

This Knowledge Transfer Programme is part of CAEL's ongoing intervention in the areas of capacity building for entrepreneurship education and enterprise development in Africa. Within the past five years, the centre has run training programmes focusing on entrepreneurship education and curriculum development, and leadership training workshops. More than 150 executives of higher institutions in Africa, including vice chancellors, provosts, and directors of centres, have participated in the training programmes. They represent more than 40 institutions of higher education, mostly from Nigeria.

Quality assurance in Higher education in Africa

The population of 18-23 age group in Africa has grown dramatically in recent years. That age group is set to grow by more than 50% by 2030, from its 2010 population of 100,805,000 (British Council, 2014). In spite of the recent expansion of the Higher Education sector, with the increase in the number of higher institutions, there are still significant problems of access to higher education in Africa. For example, compared with the 30% rate of access in the rest of the world, the rate of access is 10% in Nigeria, 12% in Ghana, and 4% in Kenya. For the entire region, the average rate of access to higher education is 7%.

There is an even bigger challenge with the standard of education provided in much of Africa's institutions of higher education. There are growing concerns that the quality of education is being compromised by the need to expand enrolment, and employers and businesses have complained about the poor quality of graduates, in terms of their levels of technical and transferable skills (Materu, 2007).

Fewer countries, notably South Africa and Nigeria, conduct system-wide quality monitoring and evaluation in the HE sector in Africa. In general, the quality assurance process in Africa



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is hampered by lack of fund and human resources. Specifically, there is a dearth of adequately trained professionals in the national agencies to manage the process with consistent and integrity at the national levels. Furthermore, there is lack of adequate number of staff at the individual institutions with the requisite expertise and skills to manage self-evaluation and peer reviews that are then fed into the national process (Materu, 2007).

In Nigeria, the quality assurance process has been affected by the preponderance of so-called degree mills- unaccredited organisations who offer certificates and diplomas for a fee, with little requirement on the parts of their clients to complete course works. In addition, the Nigerian Higher Education sector has, in the past two decades, been affected by the phenomenon of brain drain, by which many experienced academics have left the continent for “greener pastures”. Moreover, funding is a pressing matter of concern for higher education in Nigeria, with incessant industrial actions by the academic staff unions disrupting university calendars and impacting on the quality of higher education (Okebukola, 2010).

Following the end of 15 years of military rule in 1998, successive civilian governments in Nigeria have made considerable efforts to institute policy and institutional reforms in the higher education sector. Among others, the government has increased funding for universities, reconstituted university councils and given them full responsibility for institutional governance. Furthermore, it has circumscribed the powers of the regulatory agencies, vested university senates with the authority to decide curricula, and restored to the universities the rights to set selection criteria for new intakes, a part of the overall strategy to address the problem of falling standards (Saint, Hartnett and Strassner, 2003)

Quality assurance has been defined in terms of its dual objective of quality maintenance and quality improvement. In the international arena, there are ongoing debates about the need to strike the right balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability, and how this will affect quality. In the UK, following the expansion of higher education, there was increased need to provide re-assurance for the public that public expenditure on higher education was providing value for money. This was done through a multi-stakeholder system involving the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), Universities UK (UUK), and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) and the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), among others (Hodson and Thomas, 2003).

As debates continue within and among countries about the role and form of quality assurance in higher education, some consensus has emerged on core elements that should underpin a good quality assurance process. These are:

1. Semi-autonomous agencies
2. Explicit standards and expectations
3. Self-study by the academic institution or unit



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4. External review by visiting experts
5. Written recommendations
6. Public reporting
7. Attention to both process and results (El-khawas, Depietro-Jurand and Holm-Nielsen, 1998).

Training review

Participants for this training include Principal Officers and Administrators in Tertiary (Private & Public) Institutions e.g., Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, Council Members of Education Institutions, Proprietors of Universities and Colleges, Executives of Federal & State Ministries of Education, Rectors, Provosts, Bursars, Registrars, and Faculty/College Deans. Drawing from established academic processes and protocols successfully employed over the years by the University of Wolverhampton, participants were introduced to some key best practices and challenges associated with increased institutional autonomy, greater system differentiation and efficiency, strengthened governance and tested mechanisms for quality assurance delivery in a higher institution

Participants were helped to develop templates for proposals for local and international funding for research and project funding. This is an area that is especially less well developed in Nigeria, and even more critical in the light of funding problems experienced by most public institutions. They were also taken through ideas and methods for effective management of project and research funds. This is necessary in order to achieve the aims and target outputs for research funds, and open up more opportunities for funding of new projects. Furthermore, participants developed templates for quality assurance and better differentiation in their institutions.

The training participants went through a fairly detailed discussion of the principles and practice of quality assurance in the UK. Among other things, they were introduced to the idea of threshold academic standard, which is the minimum level of achievement a student has to reach in order to succeed and obtain a qualification in any of the UK universities. This threshold is the same in all higher institutions. The mechanisms used for quality assurance include: institutional/peer review process; self-evaluative documentation; 5-6 year cycle of reviews; collaborative audit of HE providers; in-country reviews of institutions delivering HE courses. The overall process is coordinated by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), whose strategic aims are to:

- Meet students' needs and be valued by them
- To safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- To drive improvements in UK higher education
- To improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality



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Participants also reviewed the Quality Code, set by the QAA to guide UK HE providers on requirements and expectations they must meet. Among other things, the quality code:

- Covers issues relating to setting and maintaining academic standards
- Covers issues relevant to ensuring that the quality of learning opportunities meets expectations and is continually being improved
- It addresses how providers make available information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (QAA, 2015)

The training also highlighted how the quality assurance process is conducted at the university level by breaking it down to a number of key components, as follows:

- Module evaluations
- Course journal
- School level report (learning and teaching and external examination)
- University level report
- Approved report presented to the academic board

Transnational education, human resources and income generation

In addition to the foregoing, participants also went through sessions on transnational education, management and administration of human resources, business engagement and income generation, and research, innovation and enterprise support.

The session on transnational education (TNE) highlighted how the UK has harnessed its competitive advantage as global leader in HE provision: presently, UK qualifications are delivered in 223 countries outside the UK. Among other things, TNE has helped UK universities, and can help universities elsewhere, to :develop their brand in a new market; expand your international operations and internationalisation strategies; open doors to other types of partnerships such as research links; and actively promotes mobility for staff and students.

The training delegates were also introduced to the framework for management of human resources in the UK HE sector. This is typified by current practice at the University of Wolverhampton, whose HR policy framework covers a wide range of issues including induction and probation, disciplinary policy, managing absence and workplace rehabilitation, grievance, unfair discrimination, harassment and bullying poor performance, flexible working, organisational change and redundancy appraisal. The HR system is continually being improved, based on feedback from users. A modern HR system, it was argued, should be adaptable, make good use of self-service web interface and electronic forms, should have a good link to the finance system, and should have a strong reporting capability and a workflow to provide paperless authorisation(Davies, 2012).



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Finally, participants also spent considerable time exploring options for income generation for their universities, drawing from the example of the University of Wolverhampton, through business engagement and enterprise support, among others. Through its business engagement strategy, the University of Wolverhampton has been able to obtain funding “from regional, national or international bodies; or directly from the provision of tailored programmes, training, and consultancy or contract research to public, private and third-sector organisations”(Peak, 2012).

Recommendations

Based on the training workshop, the following recommendations were put forward to the participants, based on global best practices for quality assurance and income generation in the HE sector:

1. Improvement of capacity building- especially through recruitment and adequate training of staff- for the national agencies saddled with the responsibility of managing quality assurance process in higher institutions.
2. Provision of continuous training for staff responsible for quality assurance at the level of individual institutions.
3. Setting up of a comprehensive and thorough peer review process in each institution, from the level of modules to department, faculty and university-wide internal review.
4. Allocation of adequate budgetary provision, at the university and national levels, for effective conduct of quality assurance.
5. Adoption and enforcement of clearly defined thresholds for academic standards applicable in all public and private institutions of higher learning.
6. Maintenance of university of autonomy in practice, free from undue political interference and interventions.
7. Setting up of independent national agencies and councils, as obtains in the UK, for oversight and disbursement of dedicated fund for research and innovative pedagogy, based on output and performance of individual institutions.
8. Setting up of dedicated units and centres in the university responsible for promotion of research-informed teaching.
9. Setting up of dedicated units in universities responsible for business engagement and management of contract research, consultancies and other ideas for commercialisation of research within the universities.
10. Setting up or improvement of – as the case may be- entrepreneurship centres within the universities, to enhance graduate employability and overall learning experience for students. These centres should be based on adoption of twenty-first century best practices in practical instructions, business incubation, mentoring, seed funding and other relevant support.



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