



CAEL Series for Entrepreneurship and Leadership Development in Africa

**A Report by the Centre for African Entrepreneurship and Leadership, University of
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**“Assessment for Excellence and Higher Education financing in Nigeria: Research,
Policy and Practice”**

Executive Summary

In response to the dramatic growth of youth population, and the growing attractiveness and desirability of higher education, Nigeria has witnessed significant expansion in the HE sector, with increase in the number of HE providers and HE enrolment in recent years. At the same time, there are growing concerns about the quality of education provided, and how this is monitored and evaluated. These concerns are exacerbated by the challenge of funding, and how this affects access to HE, and quality monitoring and evaluation.

In the light of the expansion in the HE sector, there are growing concerns and interests on the need to ensure good quality of HE education, through a well-designed process of assessment and evaluation. In addition, funding is a big challenge for universities and other higher education in Nigeria. The national government is struggling to meet the funding demands of public universities, amid calls for a fundamental rethink of the funding system and the desire for alternate funding sources that do not have negative impact on access to HE.

The training featured topics on assessment in higher education, evaluation and quality management, detecting plagiarism using Turnitin, winning commercial income, and managing university finance in a changing sector. Furthermore, and as template for the Nigerian education ministry to consider, the workshop highlighted key provisions in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, built around the student life cycle. These include programme design, development and approval; recruitment and admission, student engagement, assessment and external examination, among others.

Based on the training, recommendations were made to the Federal Ministry of Education to develop a blueprint for governance and accountability that can be applied consistently in the nation’s public and private HE institutions. In addition, participating institutions were encouraged to invest resources in developing dynamic assessment frameworks that foster deep learning, critical reflection and long-term retention of concepts. They were also encouraged to establish or strengthen academic conduct units responsible for dealing with cases of academic misconduct with fairness, promptness and transparency. Finally, participants were supported to develop templates for research and funding proposal, and for better financial management.



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Introduction

In the light of the ongoing expansion of the Higher Education sector in Nigeria and the rest of Africa, there are growing concerns about how the quality of HE provision is monitored and assessed, and how HE is funded. In the light of these, the main aim of the workshop was to create awareness and sensitise participants to the success factors and challenges in assessing for quality in Higher Education, as well as to provide them with an insight into the management of finances within a higher education environment. The training was delivered in July 2014 to a 13-member delegation comprising mainly of Deputy Vice Chancellors (Academic), Registrars, Bursars and Higher Education Practitioners.

This Knowledge Transfer Programme is part of CAEL's ongoing intervention in the areas of capacity building for leadership development and entrepreneurship education in Africa. Within the past five years, the centre has run training programmes focusing on corporate governance, quality assurance, entrepreneurship education and curriculum development, among others. More than 150 senior 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.

Issues in Higher Education financing

Higher Education (HE) has always been a key component of government agenda throughout the world, as the HE sector is critical for a nation's production of highly skilled workforce, and the driver of a nation's advances in knowledge, and science and technology. Whether a Higher Education is publicly or privately funded, it has always commanded attention and interest from the public because of its key functions in promoting and preserving public good.

In the light of rapid changes in the world in the past few decades, Higher Education financing has come under intense scrutiny. This development has been explained under 5 key themes by Johnstone (1998): i) expansion and diversification- of enrolment, number of institutions, etc; ii) fiscal pressures- declining per student expenditure, low paid faculty, lack of equipment and libraries; iii) the search for non-governmental revenues in an age of market orientations and solutions; iv) the demand for greater accountability on the part of institutions; v) the demand for greater quality and efficiency.

In the UK, debates about higher education have centred on the idea that higher education is a right and should be free at the point of use. However, this central argument is complicated by the challenge of limited funding, as higher education is heavily dependent on taxation. Barr (2004) and Barr & Crawford (2005) highlighted three key lessons that can be drawn from economic theory on the management of Higher Education Financing. The first is that central



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planning is increasingly inadequate and inappropriate to meet the challenges of the 21st century. There is a strong case for giving universities the liberty to set tuition fees, not only for postgraduates and international students, but UK and EU undergraduate programmes too. Some have also argued for relaxation of enrolment quotas. The second lesson is about the need for graduates to share in the costs of higher education. While it can be argued that, aside from individual rewards, higher education is beneficial to society as whole (Wigger and von Weizsäcker, 2001); there is strong evidence on private returns to degrees. In the UK, graduate contribution is structured through repayment of student loans. The third and final lesson is related to specific characteristics of student loans, especially with respect to the need to have income-contingent repayments, a rational interest rate, and a loan that covers both tuition and living costs.

In developing countries, observers, especially international donors, have advanced the view that basic and secondary levels of education offer higher social rates of return. It is argued, therefore, that public funds should be re-allocated from higher education to the lower tiers of primary and secondary education, in order to advance public good. Others have pointed out, however, that this argument is based on a loose and largely inaccurate estimate of social rates of returns. In particular, it is argued that this assumption fails to take into account the impact of research and postgraduate training on public good (Birdsall, 1996).

The more pertinent issues for developing countries like Nigeria is how public funding in the HE sector can achieve better value for money, in terms of capacity building and industry-linked and industry informed research, among others. Furthermore, there is a critical need for universities and other higher education institutions to aggressively pursue non-governmental funding through commercialisation of research, more effective partnership with businesses and industry stakeholders, and other entrepreneurial activities. Finally, HE providers in Africa, in particular, need to deal with pressing problems of misallocation and poor prioritization of limited resources, especially those related to the provision of free or highly subsidized accommodation, and maintenance of large non-academic personnel (Teferra and Altbachl, 2004).

Training review

Participants were taken through procedures and strategies for detecting and dealing with various forms of academic misconduct. Three forms of misconduct were highlighted: plagiarism, collusion, and cheating. The delegates were introduced to soft wares like *Turnitin*, which is used to detect plagiarism, as well as other practical strategies for detecting misconduct. They also explored various levels of sanctions that can be applied against offenders, ranging from resit to re-take and exclusion.



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Furthermore, the delegates were introduced to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education(QAA, 2015), in which the following key values were highlighted:

- Every student is treated fairly and with dignity, courtesy and respect.
- Every student has the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of their learning experience.
- Every student is properly and actively informed at appropriate times of matters relevant to their programmes of study.
- All policies and processes relating to study and programmes are clearly explained and transparent.
- Strategic oversight of academic standards and academic quality is at the highest level of academic governance of the provider.
- All policies and processes are regularly and effectively monitored, reviewed and improved.
- Sufficient and appropriate external involvement exists for the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.
- All staff are supported, enabling them in turn to support students' learning experiences.

Following on from overarching values, delegates were also encouraged to examine the key provisions of the UK Quality Code, with a view to identifying the various aspects that can be used to improve existing practice at the Nigerian national context, as well as the local contexts of the individual institutions. These key provisions, built around the student life cycle, covered the following areas:

1. Programme design, development and approval
2. Recruitment, selection and admission to higher education
3. Learning and teaching
4. Enabling student development and achievement
5. Student engagement
6. Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning
7. External examining
8. Programme monitoring and review
9. Academic appeals and student complaints
10. Managing higher education provision with others
11. Research degrees

The training also highlighted the observation by many practitioners that traditional exams have generally been over-used, and they may not always be fit for purpose in terms of evaluating the quality of students learning. Therefore, the delegates explored alternative methods of assessment like: portfolios; in-class tests; posters; reflective commentaries; reviews; presentations; and case studies. These methods of assessment should satisfy key criteria including transparency (explicit criteria); reliable (with respect to grading, say); and fit for the level.

Finally, the delegates were taken through a session on the University of Wolverhampton's model for financial management, so they can explore ways in which they can adapt the template to the specific contexts of their respective institutions. The session highlighted the



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use of Financial Key Performance Indicators (FKPI) to keep track of university's finances, and how this should be a key component of the accountability process.

Recommendations

Based on the training, the following recommendations were made to the participating institutions, as well as the Nigerian Government:

1. Adoption of a dynamic assessment framework that is underpinned by the need to promote deep learning, and encourage critical reflection and long term retention of concepts.
2. Development and use of alternative approaches to assessment to mitigate over-reliance and excessive use of traditional, time-constrained examinations.
3. Adoption of suitable Equality and Diversity framework to help learners recognise the need to be aware of, and respect, diversity of religious and cultural beliefs. This will improve the learning environment and enhance the overall learning experience of students.
4. Establishment or reform of academic conduct units equipped with high-trained staff and given the mandate to deal with all cases of academic misconduct with fairness, transparency, and promptness.
5. Establishment of the office of independent adjudicator with a national mandate to look into students' appeal against sanctions imposed by individual institutions for various cases of academic misconduct. This will further enhance the fairness of the process for dealing with cases of academic misconduct.
6. Investment in relevant software like *Turnitin* for staff to detect more easily instances of plagiarism in student essays and course works.
7. Investment in web-based applications like *Aggresso* for better management of financial services including payment, procurement and insurance, among others.
8. Adoption of Financial Key Performance Indicators to help the institutions keep track of their finances, and identify areas of challenges and opportunities.
9. Development of a new national framework for HE financing, follow detailed consultation with a whole spectrum of stakeholders including students, institutions, industry and the wider public. Such a framework should consider ways to incorporate structured contributions of employed graduates, as well as ensure access to HE is not hindered or limited by socio-economic background.
10. Development of new strategies and framework for capturing other sources of funding for institutions through commercialisation of research, consultancies, and other entrepreneurial activities at the levels of individual institutions.



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