
1. Quality Assurance Mechanisms

Most institutions of higher learning in Uganda have some form of internal quality assurance mechanisms. However, the National Council for Higher Education is developing an overall Quality Assurance Framework with two major components:

(a) The regulatory component at the level of the National Council for Higher Education; and
(b) Institutional audits at each individual university level.

2. The National Council for Higher Education

The National Council for Higher Education was established under “The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001” for

(a) regulating and guiding the establishment and management” of institutions of higher learning and
(b) ensuring the quality of higher education, equating of qualifications and to advise government on higher education issues

The detailed functions of the National Council for Higher Education are to advise the Minister of Education on higher education issues, to establish an accreditation system (and do the accrediting), to investigate complaints, to evaluate national human resources requirements, to set national admission standards, to ensure that institutions of higher learning have adequate physical structures (and education facilities), to publish information on higher education, to determine equivalences of academic and professional awards and credits between institutions as well as tertiary education policy formation.

3. The regulatory component

The regulations and standards stipulated by the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, and its amendments of 2003 and 2006 form the basis for the regulatory component. The key areas are as follows:

(a) Institutional accreditation by Council;
(b) Accrediting of individual programmes;
(c) Enforcing merit-based admissions into higher education institutions;
(d) Setting minimum requirement for courses of study;
(e) Ensuring the quality of teaching staff;
(f) Ensuring that there are examination regulations and standards of academic awards;
(g) Making sure that students assess academic staff;
(h) Defining minimum institutional infrastructure;
(i) Collaborating with professional bodies to ensure quality higher education and
(j) Regulating cross-border higher education.
4. Institutional audits

Institutional audits will be the core of the institutional quality assurance sub-component. The main objectives of the institutional audits are to:

- Encourage higher education providers to cultivate and maintain a culture of continuous performance improvement;
- Validate self-evaluation reports;
- Enable institutions to develop reliable quality assurance performance indicators to assure stakeholders and the National Council for Higher Education that the policies, strategies and resources for the delivery of quality higher education are in place;
- Provide information to stakeholders and the National Council for Higher Education about strengths and weaknesses of the institution;
- Enable the National Council for Higher Education to obtain baseline information through a common set of audit criteria for all institutions.

The Institutional audits criteria will cover the following aspects:

a) Institutional governance (vision, mission, strategic planning and the functionality of university organs).
b) The quality of teaching and learning
c) The quality of academic staff
d) Sufficiency of education facilities
e) Research and publication
f) The quality of outputs
g) Institutional financial management
h) The university and the community
i) Any other item worth auditing

5 The Context: nature of higher education institutions

Higher education institutions in Uganda are broadly categorized as other tertiary institutions and universities. Uganda has four public universities¹, sixteen private universities² and one university college³. There are 137 other tertiary institutions. University education is preferred to tertiary education. Part of the initial quality assurance mechanism undertaken by the NCHE is an annual review of the status of higher education in Uganda. The 2005 report has been published, some of the key parameters are discussed below

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¹ Makerere University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Kyambogo University and Gulu University.
² IUIU, Ndejje University, Uganda Martyrs University, Bugema University, Busoga University, Nkamba University, Uganda Christian University, Kampala University, Kampala International University, Aga Khan University, Kumi University, Kabale University, MMU, African Bible College, Uganda Pentecostal University and Fairland University.
³ Bishop Barham University College.
5.1 Student enrolment

Student enrolment in Uganda has been on the raise since the 1970s. Student numbers have increased from about 5,000 during the 1970s to over 124,314 in 2005. It increased by 15% from 108,295 in 2004 to 124,314 in 2005. Universities enrolment is 63% (78,107) of total students in the sector. Gross enrolment ratio is rose marginally from 4.0% to 4.1% 2004 to 2005. The percentage of women enrolled in the sub sector dropped from 41.1% in 2004 to 40.7% in 2005. Enrollments in science and technology increased from 17.9% (19,042) in 2004 to 23.3% (28,852) in 2005. This is due to the high growth of enrollment in technical colleges, which grew by 23% (from 1695 to 2084). Furthermore, the number of students taking science and technology rose from 15.3% (9,771) in 2004 to 20.2% (15,527). This is, however, still below the 40% science and technology percentage that is believed to catalyze economic development. The number of foreign students more than doubled from 2.7% (2947) in 2004 to 6.2% (7,735) in 2005 of total registration.

5.5 Education facilities

The increasing numbers of students were not matched by increases in education facilities. The overall student to book ratio dropped from 1:20 in 2004 to 1:18 in 2005. The overall computer to student ratio dropped from 1:35 to 1:46 in the same period. Other educational inputs like audio-visual aids, chemicals, equipment, transport facilities and the like have not improved since 2004.

5.6 Recruitment and retention of academic staff

Staff strength during the 2004-05 period grew from 5,249 to 5,258 (1%). Student enrollment, however, grew by 15% highlighting the widening mismatch of staff and student numbers.

Universities have the most qualified staff with 93% (520) of PhDs and 1794 of Masters holders. The overall staff to student ratio for universities was 1:24 but those of Makerere and Kyambogo (1:33) and Nkumba (1:32) were unacceptably high. That of MUBS of 1:47 was definitely worse and unacceptable. The percentage of full time staff climbed a mere 3% from 56.5% to 59.7% of total. Lecturers still moonlight amongst a number of institutions thus spreading their hands thin.

5.7 Other Quality Issues

Other Quality Aspects highlighted include relevance of curriculum to national development needs, infrastructure, education facilities and research and publications within a constrained resource envelope, and decreasing public financing for both the universities and other tertiary institutions.

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4 However, actual numbers increased from 63,574 to 69,558.
5 The majority are at Islamic University in Uganda, Kampala International University and Bugema University.
a) Curriculum relevance

The majority of offered programmes are still theoretical and not relevant to the job market. Few programmes have internship or practical training in the world of work. Institutions do not liaise with the market to produce graduates for the private sector instead of the traditional civil service. They have not changed the major elements of the curricula of the 1960s, which was designed to produce civil servants. Further, institutions are not producing for the external market. The majority of Ugandans in Europe and America are unskilled and engage mainly in manual labour and or odd jobs (kyeyos).

b) Research and Publications

There is limited research in institutions of higher learning in Uganda. Most of the research in our postgraduate schools is a requisite for postgraduate awards or is consultancy oriented.

c) Infrastructure

The infrastructure of institutions is no longer able to sustain the growing numbers of students. The available classroom, library, laboratory and learning space is old, dilapidated, and needs refurbishment. This is especially true of public universities. The student to space ratio of libraries, classrooms, laboratories, playing fields and other learning facilities is far from ideal as per NCHE gazetted standards. Many institutions, particularly private ones, do not have laboratories. Where there are laboratories, the available facilities do not match student numbers.

6. Financing of the sub-sector

Inadequate funding compounded by the politics of fees, donor policies and insufficient national income is one of the major challenges in the delivery of quality higher education in Uganda. This has resulted into: out dated curricula, institutional inability to recruit and retain qualified staff, inappropriate instruction materials, insufficient laboratory materials and equipment and inadequate physical facilities. Most science and technology students find it difficult to complete their programmes and receive a lot more theoretical than practical training. Unless the financing of the sub-sector is addressed, the quality of higher education will continue to deteriorate. Financing of higher education remains the most troubling problem of the sub-sector. Institutions get less than 30% of unit costs for each student per year.

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6 Most of it constructed in the colonial period.
7 Kyambogo and Makerere.
8 Space in libraries fell from 0.30square meters in 2004 to 0.23square meters per student in 2005
The National Council for Higher Education plays a supervisory role, however it is mandated to apply sanctions where the higher education institutions do not meet the requirements and set standards. Each institution is expected to finance these requirements from the available financial resources.