

LICENSING, ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

BY

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Paper presented at a session of the 2008 CHEA Summer Workshop

1.0 PROTOCOLS

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The demand for higher education, particularly university education is on the increase all over the world. Consequently, there must be a proactive orchestration of efforts to satisfy the yearnings of the people for this level of education. A forward looking government, no matter what it costs, will ensure that its citizenry is educated; not just any kind of education but a focused and qualitative one. For nations with very high rates of illiteracy levels there could be advocacy for basic education; at least they must start somewhere. Nevertheless, there is a level a nation cannot go beyond with basic education only, even though it is the foundation on which every other stratum of education rests. Higher education combined with high levels of commitment of the citizenry to national development is therefore the key to technological advancement of any nation. The developed countries of the world have proved it to be true as most of them have a long history of higher education. Developing nations must take a cue from them.

It is not enough to license a higher education institution to operate; there must be a constant evaluation to ensure that set standards and operational guides are not violated. A system that grows is such that sets standards and disciplines itself to attain them. Accreditation of universities be it institutional or programme is a way of examining the state of the institution in relation to where it out to be. It is a quality assurance process. Prior to the licensing of a university, some quality indices are taken into consideration to

ensure that they take off on the right footing. Consequently, licensing, accreditation and quality assurance are related in a wider context.

In the light of this background, I feel honoured, privileged and delighted to have been given the opportunity to present this paper titled “Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Universities: Achievements and Challenges”. I particularly believe that every time we have the opportunity to discuss quality issues especially as it relates to higher education, the utmost attention and concentration is desired for such moments; as no nation can develop beyond the quality of its higher education. I therefore owe it a duty to congratulate the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for organizing yet another successful conference.

In order to fully comprehend the topic of my presentation, since I am using the Nigerian University System as a case study, it is imperative that I take you through the development of university education in Nigeria.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA’S HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in Nigeria dates back to the 19th century when, propelled by the ideals of liberal education as introduced by the early missionaries, Nigerians sought opportunities to acquire this new and exciting vision of life, which was then only available overseas. Responding to the pressures generated by this hunger for knowledge, the colonial government established the Yaba Higher College in 1932. The College was established to provide “well qualified assistants” in medical, engineering, and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools, then known as “higher middle schools”. With passage of time, the college offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration.

The restricted scope and vision of Yaba College generated greater pressures on the colonial administration to expand the opportunities for higher education. The British government responded by establishing the Elliot Commission in 1945. In its report, the Commission suggested that “the need for educated Africans in West Africa in general far

outruns the supply, present and potential” and proceeded to recommend the establishment of a University College in Nigeria. Thus in 1948, the University College of Ibadan was established as a residential and tutorial College under the tutelage of the University of London.

In 1959, another Commission, the Ashby Commission was established to ascertain Nigeria’s post-independence educational needs. In 1960, the University of Nigeria Nsukka was established as the first indigenous University in Nigeria. The findings of the Ashby Commission regarding balance in the structure and geographical distribution of University education led to the establishment of Universities of Lagos and Ife in 1962, the same year the University College, Ibadan attained an autonomous status as a degree awarding institution. Propelled by the increased income from oil and the increased demand for higher education in the country, in 1975 the Federal Government decided to take over the regional Universities at Zaria, Ile-Ife, and Nsukka as well as establish new ones – the Universities of Benin, Calabar, Jos and Maiduguri, with University Colleges at Ilorin, Port-Harcourt and Kano, all of which became full fledged Universities in 1977.

As the Federal Universities grew in number and population of students, State Universities started emerging in 1979 with the Rivers State University of Science and Technology taking the lead. In the same vein, the emergence of private providers of university education in Nigeria became a reality when the first three Private Universities were licensed to operate in 1999 after an earlier failed attempt. Currently, Nigeria has ninety-one (91) universities comprising twenty-seven (27) federal universities, thirty (30) state universities and thirty-two (34) private universities. The staff strength of Nigerian universities is 99, 464 comprising of 27, 394 academic staff and 72, 070 non-teaching staff. The current total students enrolment in Nigerian universities stands at 1, 096,312.

Table 1: Staff strength in Nigerian Universities (2006/2007)

ACADEMIC STAFF		TOTAL
PROFESSOR/READER		5483 (20%)
SENIOR LECTURER		6475 (23.6%)
LECTURER I AND BELOW		15436 (56.4%)
TOTAL	27394	
NON-TEACHING STAFF		
SENIOR NON-ACADEMIC		30275 (42%)
JUNIOR		41795 (58%)
TOTAL	72070	
GRAND TOTAL ALL STAFF	99464	

Table 2: Students enrolment in Nigerian Universities (2006/2007)

PROPRIETORSHIP	SUB DEGREE	UNDER GRADUATE	POST GRADUATE	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
FEDERAL	49999	503154	57300	610453	55.7
STATE	8734	419901	19459	448094	40.9
PRIVATE	357	36641	767	37765	3.4
TOTAL	59090	959,696	77526	1096312	
PERCENTAGE	5.4	87.5	7.1		100
GRAND TOTAL			1,096,312		

Table 3: Nigerian Universities by Proprietorship, Year of Establishment and Type

S/N	FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES			STATE UNIVERSITIES			PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES		
	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type
1	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	1948	Conventional	Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port-Harcourt	1979	Technology	Babcock University, Ilishan Remo	1999	Conventional
2	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1960	Conventional	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	1980	Conventional	Madonna University, Okija	1999	Conventional
3	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	1962	Conventional	Abia State University, Uturu	1981	Conventional	Igbinedion University, Okada	1999	Conventional
4	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	1962	Conventional	Enugu State University of Science & Tech, Enugu	1982	Technology	Bowen University, Iwo	2001	Conventional
5	University of Lagos, Lagos	1962	Conventional	Olabisi Anabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	1982	Conventional	Covenant University, Ota	2002	Conventional
6	University of Benin, Benin City	1970	Conventional	Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos	1983	Conventional	Pan-African University, Lagos	2002	Specialized (PG Only)
7	Bayero University, Kano	1975	Conventional	University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	1982	Conventional	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002	Conventional
8	University of Calabar, Calabar	1975	Conventional	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso	1990	Technology	ABTI-American University, Yola	2003	Conventional
9	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	1975	Conventional	Imo State University, Owerri	1992	Conventional	Redeemers University	2005	Conventional
10	University of Jos, Jos	1975	Conventional	Benue State University, Makurdi	1988	Conventional	Ajayi Crowther University, Ibadan	2005	Conventional

S/N	FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES			STATE UNIVERSITIES			PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES		
	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type
11	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	1975	Conventional	Delta State University, Abraka	1992	Conventional	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	2005	Conventional
12	Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto	1975	Conventional	Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko	1999	Conventional	Caritas University, Amorji-Nke, Enugu	2005	Conventional
13	University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt	1975	Conventional	Kogi State University, Anyigba	1999	Conventional	CETEP City University, Lagos	2005	Conventional
14	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	1980	Technology	Niger-Delta University, Yenagoa	2000	Conventional	Bingham University, Jos	2005	Conventional
15	Federal University of Technology, Akure	1981	Technology	Anambra State University of Science & Technology	2000	Technology	Katsina University, Katsina	2005	Conventional
16	Federal University of Technology, Yola	1981	Technology	Kano State University of Technology, Wudil	2000	Technology	Renaissance University, Enugu	2005	Conventional
17	Federal University of Technology, Minna	1982	Technology	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	2000	Conventional	Bells University of Technology, Badagary	2005	Conventional
18	Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna	1985	Military	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	2002	Conventional	Lead City University of Ibadan, Oyo State	2005	Conventional
19	University of Abuja,	1988	Conventional	Adamawa State University, Mubi	2002	Conventional	Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State	2005	Conventional
20	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	1988	Technolgy	Gombe State University, Gombe	2004	Conventional	Wukari Jubilee University	2005	Conventional
21	University of Agriculture, Makurdi	1988	Agriculture	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	2004	Conventional	Crescent University, Abeokuta	2005	Conventional

S/N	FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES			STATE UNIVERSITIES			PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES		
	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type
22	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	1988	Agriculture	Cross River University of Science & Tech.	2004	Technology	Novena University, Ogume, Delta State	2005	Conventional
23	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	1992	Conventional	Plateau State University, Boko	2005	Conventional	University of Mkar	2005	Conventional
24	University of Uyo, Uyo	1991	Conventional	Akwa Ibom State University of Technology	2005	Technology	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji Osun State	2006	Conventional
25	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	1992	Agriculture	Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai Niger State	2005	Conventional	Caleb University, Lagos	2007	Conventional
26	National Open University, Abuja	2002	ODL	Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun	2005	Specialized	Fountain University, Oshogbo	2007	Conventional
27	Fed. Univ. of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	2007	Specialized	Katsina State University	2006	Conventional	Obong University, Obong Ntak	2007	Conventional
28				Bukar Abba Ibrahim University, Damaturu Yobe State	2006	Conventional	Salem University, Lokoja	2007	Conventional
29				Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	2006	Technology	Tansian University, Umunya	2007	Conventional
30				Osun State University, Osogbo	2006	Conventional	Veritas University, Abuja	2007	Conventional
31							Wesley Univ. of Science & Tech., Ondo	2007	Science & Technology

S/N	FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES			STATE UNIVERSITIES			PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES		
	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type	Name	Year	Type
32							Western Delta Univ., Oghara, Delta State	2007	Conventional
33							The Achievers University	2007	Conventional
34							African Univ. of Science & Tech., Abuja	2007	Science & Technology

4.0 LICENSING OF UNIVERSITIES

From the historical account of the Nigerian University System, it is obvious that there are three different proprietors of university education in Nigeria. These are the Federal government, the State governments and the private or corporate bodies. Irrespective of proprietorship, government is responsible for the licensing of universities in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the procedures are different.

4.1 FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES

The old regional governments in Nigeria licensed the first set of universities in the different regions of the country. These universities were eventually taken over by the federal government. Subsequently, the federal government established universities in the country based on need and the necessity to have a balanced spread across the regions and States of the Federation.

Whenever such needs are identified, the government through the National Universities Commission carries out the necessary assessments and resource verification that eventually lead to the establishment of such federal universities. The financial implication for the smooth take-off of such universities are worked out following which the government release take-off grants to the university to begin its operations.

4.2 STATE UNIVERSITIES

In the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, education is on the concurrent list. Consequently, State governments have the constitutional backing to establish their own universities. Once the State House of Assembly promulgates the Act for establishing the university and the Governor assents to the bill, the law is passed for the establishment of the state university. Although the National Universities Commission does not have to approve the establishment of State Universities, it is responsible for ensuring that laid down standards are adhered to; thus ensuring the delivery of quality education in the universities.

4.3 PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

As a result of growing increase in the number of prospective candidates for admission into universities and increasing inability of existing public universities to cope with the rate of increase in demand for university placement, as well as government's (both Federal and State) inability to adequately fund the Nigerian universities, the Federal government invited private individuals into the operation of universities following wide consultation with relevant university organs. Therefore, government promulgated Act No 9 of 1993.

Act No.9 of 1993, repealed the private universities (abolition and prohibition) Act of 1984 and allowed individuals, organizations, corporate bodies as well as local governments to establish and run private universities upon meeting laid down guidelines and subsequently obtaining approval of government. The decree stipulated the various documents that should be submitted to NUC by proprietors of proposed universities as well as other conditions that should be met to enable the Commission assess the adequacy or otherwise of the applications for government's approval. Thus, the NUC started issuing application forms to prospective proprietors of private universities, as far back as September 1993.

4.3.1 PROCESSES INVOLVED IN LICENSING PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

In order to avoid the serious threats to standards of teaching and learning which was posed on Nigerian universities by the twenty-four private institutions that operated in the 80's, the Management of the National Universities Commission rose to the challenges faced during the process of approving private universities by establishing the Standing Committee on (the establishment of) Private Universities (SCOPU) on 27th May 1993. The Committee is to ensure a fair, effective, thorough and prompt evaluation of all application forms received by the Commission from individuals, organizations as well as corporate bodies wishing to establish private universities bearing in mind the sensitive nature of the issue. The Committee has the following as its terms of reference:

- To consider applications received by the National Universities Commission from individuals and organizations wishing to establish private universities;

- To assess the applications received; and
- To prepare a report of its assessment of each application to Management Committee of the Commission, which will consider and make recommendations to the University Development Committee (UDC) for onward submission to the NUC Board and eventually to Government for consideration and appropriate decision.

Upon obtaining application forms, the proprietors of proposed universities are expected to complete ten copies of such application forms and submit same to the Federal Ministry of Education through the National Universities Commission. SCOPU then promptly attends to the processing of these forms, and considers the requests to establish Private Universities. Starting with the collection of application forms, there is a 12-stage process to be fulfilled by prospective (would-be) private providers. The stages are as follows:

1. Application in writing stating the intent for the establishment of the university;
2. Collection of Application Forms;
3. Submission of Application Forms and relevant documents;
4. Intensive review/analysis of documents by experts in relevant NUC Department;
5. Revision of documentation by proprietor(s) based on report by SCOPU;
6. Interactive Meeting of SCOPU with the proposed universities;
7. First Site Assessment visit;
8. Finalization of documentation;
9. Second (final) Site Assessment visit;
10. Security Screening of Proprietors and Board of Trustees;
11. Approval by NUC Management;
12. Approval by NUC Board;
13. Approval by Federal Executive Council (Composition of the Council includes, the President, the Vice President and the Ministers);

Each of these stages requires an enormous amount of information thus, making the process of establishing private university, to say the least, a difficult task.

5.0 ACCREDITATION

In the years preceding 1989, accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian University System (NUS) was nonexistent despite the fact that the Federal Government of Nigeria had promulgated the necessary law towards the process. The Federal Government of Nigeria through Section 10 of Act No. 16 of 1985, incorporated as section 4(m) of the National Universities Commission (NUC) amended Act No. 49 of 1988 empowered the NUC to lay down Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards.

In its bid to comply with the provisions of the Act, the National Universities Commission through the use of experts from the universities prepared the Minimum Academic Standards in respect of 13 disciplines taught in Nigerian Universities in 1989. The disciplines include: Administration, Agriculture, Arts, Education, Engineering and Technology, Environmental Sciences, Law, Medicine and Dentistry, Management Sciences, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Sciences, Social Sciences and Veterinary Medicine. Later on MAS were developed for additional programmes.

The development of the Minimum Academic Standards and their subsequent approval provided the basis for accreditation of all degree programmes taught in Nigerian universities. The MAS thus serve as reference documents for the accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian University System. In 2004, the Commission employing the services of distinguished professors in Nigerian universities embarked on the review of the MAS documents. The exercise culminated in the evolution of Benchmarks Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for various disciplines in the Nigerian University System. These documents are ready for onward transmission to the Federal Executive Council for approval and subsequent use by Nigerian universities.

Following the development of MAS in 1989, the NUC also worked out the procedure for the accreditation exercise with the production of the following documents:

- i. Manual for accreditation procedures for academic programmes in Nigerian universities;
- ii. Self-Study form (NUC/SSF)
- iii. Programme Evaluation Form (NUC/PEF)
- iv. Accreditation Panel Report Form (NUC/APRF)
- v. Accreditation Re-visitation Form (NUC/ARVF)

5.1 HISTORY OF NUC ACCREDITATION

Accreditation of degree and other academic programmes by the NUC is a system of evaluating academic programmes in Nigeria universities as having met the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standard documents. The objectives of accreditation of academic programmes in Nigerian universities are to:

- a) Ensure that at least the provisions of the MAS documents are attained, maintained and enhanced;
- b) Assure employers and other members of the community that Nigerian graduates of all academic programmes have attained an acceptable level of competency in their areas of specialization;
- c) Certify to the international community that the programmes offered in Nigerian Universities are of high standards and their graduates are adequate for employment and for further studies.

The first in the history of accreditation of programmes in Nigerian universities was conducted in 1990 shortly after the Minimum Academic Standards were developed for all programmes existing in Nigerian universities at that time. It is on record that the exercise was unparalleled in the African continent as it was the first of its kind in this part of the globe. It was organized and conducted through the platform provided by the NUC with 100% indigenous resource persons. The exercise gave the nation the opportunity to have data-backed information on the state of education delivery in Nigerian universities.

Ten years after (1999/2000), a second comprehensive accreditation exercise of academic programmes in Nigerian universities was conducted. This was followed in 2002 with the

accreditation of those programmes that earned denied accreditation status in 1999/2000. Programmes of first generation private universities were accredited in 2004, while newly matured programmes were evaluated at the beginning of 2005. In November, 2005, 1,343 academic programmes in 48 universities were evaluated for accreditation.

The NUC took a step further in its quality assurance mandate by embarking on the accreditation of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and MBA programmes in June 2006. It was the first time ODL and MBA programmes would be accredited in the history of Nigerian Universities. The experiences garnered with the MBA accreditation, which was a pilot exercise will definitely come in handy in the eventual accreditation of postgraduate programmes in Nigerian universities.

Having risen to the challenges of the statute governing its quality assurance mandate, the National Universities Commission, no doubt, is fully stabilized on its accreditation process. This is evident in the fact that the exercise now comes up every year as programmes are continuously maturing for accreditation because they have fulfilled the required validity period for their accreditation status or that they had to make a request for re-visitation because they earned denied accreditation status in a previous visit or that they are just maturing for accreditation.

5.2 ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

When a programme is due for accreditation, the NUC gives at least three months notice to the concerned university of an accreditation visit to the particular programme, discipline or sub-discipline. At the time of the notice a Self-Study form is sent to the university for completion. The university is expected to complete and return twelve copies of the form in respect of each programme, discipline or sub-discipline to be accredited.

On receipt of the completed form, the NUC constitutes an Ad-Hoc Accreditation Panel which consists of a Chairman and four other persons from the academics, professional associations and regulatory boards or councils. In addition, the panel is serviced by a staff

of the NUC. Panel membership is limited to full professors in a discipline who have a track record of objectivity, integrity and of not compromising standards. Vice-chancellors make nominations to complement selection from the NUC database of experts. Professional bodies and registration councils also nominate their members to serve on the NUC accreditation panels. The leader of each panel is elected from among members. He/she is usually the most senior professor with accreditation experience.

With the panel in place, a coordination meeting is held to induct new members and refresh former ones, regarding the accreditation process mechanisms. Usually a full day event, this exercise begins with presentations on the philosophical and procedural framework for accreditation and continues with sessions where the assessment instruments are discussed. Step-by-step, accreditors are taken through each of the assessment instrument items. The meaning of each item, the minimum standard to be measured and the scoring procedure are explained in detail. Once panel members are well versed in using the instruments, simulation exercises are carried out. During such exercises, hypothetical case scenarios concerning what may be encountered during actual accreditation visits are presented for scoring. Panel members' scores are discussed and harmonized. The simulation exercise continues until the differential between the scores of all panel members on each item in the assessment instrument is reduced to zero. The impetus behind the entire exercise is designed to enhance inter-rater reliability. At the end of the coordination meeting, the panels leave for their accreditation sites. Care is taken to ensure that no member serves within 300km of his or her university catchment area.

5.2.1 PROGRAMME EVALUATION

At the accreditation site, the panel meets with the Vice-Chancellor, and then with the Dean of faculty, Head of Department and staff of programme to be evaluated. After the introductory meeting, the panel settles down to work for two days on assessing programme content, facilities, delivery and evaluation modes. Interviews are held with students and sample lectures and practicals are observed. Each member of the panel scores the performance of the programme during the two-day period. At the end of the

visit, the panel writes its report, which is discussed with the programme staff and the Vice-Chancellor. The report must be commented on and signed by the Vice-Chancellor, or his or her representative. Finally, the report, together with a quantitative assessment of the programme and recommendations regarding accreditation status achieved, are sent to the NUC.

Table 4: Components of Accreditation

S/N	Components	Sub-component
a)	Academic Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The programme philosophy and objectives ii) The curriculum iii) Admission requirements iv) Academic regulations v) Course evaluation (examination and continuous assessment) vi) Student course evaluation vii) External examination system
b)	Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Academic staff ii) Non-academic staff iii) Head of department/discipline/sub-discipline iv) Staff development
c)	Physical Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Laboratory/clinic/studio facility (area per student) and equipment ii) Classroom facilities and equipment iii) Laboratory size (area per student) and equipment iv) Safety and environment
d)	Financing of programme by the university	
e)	Books, journals and other resource materials for the programme	
f)	Employer's rating of graduates, if any	

5.2.2 ACCREDITATION STATUS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The accreditation status awarded to a programme may be Full, Interim or Denied, depending on the total score.

Full accreditation

Full accreditation is granted to any degree or other academic programme that has satisfied the provisions of the Minimum Academic Standards. It is granted for a period of six academic sessions with a mid-term appraisal after three years. For a programme to be granted Full accreditation status, it must attain a minimum of 70% aggregate score as well as 70% in each of the four core areas of academic content, staffing, physical facilities and library.

Interim accreditation

Interim accreditation is granted to any degree or other academic programme that has minor deficiencies that must be rectified within a stipulated period. In other words the programme must attain an aggregate score of not less than 60%. Also, a programme with a total score above 70% but which scores less than 70% in any of the indicated 4 core areas is awarded an Interim status.

Interim accreditation status is granted for a period of not more than two academic sessions after which the programme is automatically due for re-visitation.

Programmes with interim accreditation status are expected to rectify the identified deficiencies within the stipulated period of two academic sessions failure of which automatically converts the programme's accreditation status to denied. During the period of interim accreditation status, universities may continue to admit students into the affected programme.

Denied accreditation

Denied accreditation applies to any degree or other academic programme which has failed to satisfy the Minimum Academic Standards. It applies to programmes with less than 60% aggregate score. The re-visitation of the programme is at the request of the university concerned.

When an academic programme has denied accreditation status, the university ceases to admit students into such a programme with effect from the next admission exercise. The Commission informs the general public and such relevant bodies as the Joint Admissions

and Matriculation Board, National Youth Service Corps, Civil Service Commission, Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), relevant professional regulatory body, Nigerian Students Loans Board (Education Bank), National Directorate of Employment and various Federal and State Scholarship Boards about the denied accreditation status of the programme.

5.2.3 POST ACCREDITATION

The panel reports are processed at the NUC by its Management Committee and Board. Accreditation decisions on each programme are informally discussed with Vice-Chancellors, following which results are officially released to the universities and the general public after approval by the Board. The universities are notified of the strengths and weaknesses of each programme. The universities in turn use the information to remedy identified deficiencies. In cases where Vice-Chancellors contest the panel's decisions, an appellate system is in place to look into such queries. However, the original decision remains in force until overturned by an appeal.

The NUC also takes steps to calculate the cost of remedying the deficiencies of those programmes denied accreditation. The information is conveyed to the proprietor and management of the university so that further necessary action may be taken.

6.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

As it is all over the world, quality assurance in Nigerian Universities has both the external and internal component.

6.1 External Quality Assurance

The Federal government, through the National Universities Commission plays a major role in the external quality assurance process of Nigerian universities. The professional bodies on the other hand, for instance, perform minor roles in university quality assurance in the sense that they focus only on the appropriate professional programmes in the universities to ensure that the respective professional standards are adhered to.

The external quality regulatory mechanism in Nigeria therefore includes processes leading to the establishment of universities and their programmes, accreditation of programmes, admission of qualified candidates into Nigerian universities, institutional audit by the visitor to universities, monitoring and evaluation of the state of universities from time to time and collaboration with professional bodies for effective university education quality assurance.

In order to fully entrench the external quality assurance process, some innovative ideas were adopted to stimulate and promote quality in university education delivery. These include; strategic planning and management, Curriculum reform and review, Nigerian Universities System Annual Review Meetings (USARM), Linkages and collaboration with national and international development partners, development of physical structures and facilities, Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair (NURESDEF), Linkage with Experts and Academics in the Diaspora (LEAD) to mention but a few.

6.2 Internal Quality Assurance

These are the processes of evaluation, maintenance and promotion of quality within the university by the university. Every process of the administration of a university should automatically lead to delivery of quality university education. The internal mechanisms start from the point of admission into the university. In all universities, the minimum admission requirements are often stated as a basis of admission, while the admissions committees are usually set up to take care of the process. Quality is assured through the various inputs from Departments and Faculties. This ensures that candidates which do not meet the minimum requirements are not admitted.

Proposals for the establishment of programmes also follow strict internal guidelines, through which such proposals emanate from the Department, and scrutinized through faculty boards and senate. This way all relevant inputs and queries would have been made and addressed. Universities also carry out both regular monitoring, and periodic review of their programmes.

Monitoring considers how effectively a programme achieves its stated aims, and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. It is usually undertaken by the department providing the programme, and often involves a programme team appraising its own performance at the end of an academic year. The process may take into account reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback, reports from any professional body that accredits the programme, and feedback from former students and their employers. It may result in adjustments to the curriculum or to assessment, to ensure continued effectiveness.

7.0 ACHIEVEMENTS

Achievements with respect to licensing, accreditation and quality assurance in Nigerian Universities could be seen from their impact on the Nigerian University System in particular and the nation in general.

7.1 Improvement in university programme accreditation status

One of the measures of the quality of programmes offered in Nigerian universities is their accreditation status. As earlier mentioned, programmes are evaluated based on quality and quantity of input such as student, staff and facilities; quality of curriculum; quality of process especially programme delivery and evaluation; as well as employers' rating of graduates. These variables are measured against the Minimum Academic Standards to determine the standing of the programmes.

The impact of accreditation has been seen in the progressive increase in performance of universities in the accreditation exercises over the years. More programmes have earned Full accreditation status while relatively less have Interim and Denied status. This also attests to the fact that generally both external and internal quality assurance have been effective in the Nigerian University System.

Table 5: Statistics Showing Improvement in Universities' Performance in Accreditation

Year of accreditation	Number of programmes accredited	Accreditation Status		
		Full	Interim	Denied
1990/91	837	185 (22.1%)	572 (68.4%)	79 (9.5%)
1999/2000	1,119	128 (11.4%)	801 (71.6%)	190 (17%)
2005/2006	1,670	748 (44.8%)	810 (48.5%)	112 (6.7%)

Source: NUC Records

7.2 Impact on the Public

The National Universities Commission as part of its statutory obligation owes the public a duty to publicize results of accreditation exercises. Since the NUC began to publish the result of accreditation exercises and apply appropriate sanctions where necessary, the public has been responding positively to the information the Commission pushes to the public domain on accreditation. It is now a common occurrence for parents and prospective university students, to come or write to the NUC seeking the status of programmes before they subscribe to them.

In a similar vein, government agencies, corporate bodies and international organizations from time to time write to the NUC to get information of particular programmes in the Nigerian University System either because they want to sponsor their employees to such programmes or that they want to verify the quality of the certificates presented to them by their employees on staff development to such programmes.

Licensing of universities, especially the private ones in the recent past, has to some extent put the System in the right path towards fully addressing the problem of access to university education in Nigeria.

7.3 Impact on Universities

The direct impact of the NUC accreditation on Nigerian universities cannot be overemphasized. Informal comments from staff of the universities point to the fact that accreditation exercises often give the departments the opportunity of getting the university to buy them equipment and appropriate facilities for teaching and research. Some have wondered what the state of universities would be if accreditation were nonexistent. For the NUC, this is not the desirable. The vision of the NUC for Nigerian universities is that they continuously remain in the state of quality improvement rather than being quality compliant when external assessors are visiting. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that with time Nigerian universities will imbibe the culture of self-assessment for continuous quality improvement; thus making their internal quality assurance process complementary to the external process.

Further on the impact of accreditation on Nigerian universities, there are instances where proprietors have injected unprecedented amounts of money into their universities in order to remedy the deficiencies identified during accreditation exercises. A notable example is seen with Kogi State University, Anyigba where more than three quarter of its programmes presented for accreditation earned denied accreditation status in one of the accreditation exercises. When the result of the exercise was made public, the Governor of the state visited the NUC to consult on the way forward. The cost implication for remedying the university's deficiency was presented to the Governor and within a month he released the money to the university, changed the management of the university and most of the university's programmes today are at the full accreditation status level. Another example is Ebonyi State University in which some of its Science programme had denied accreditation status in 2005. By implication the university was prevented from admitting students into the programme. The State government came to the rescue of the university by injecting funds to remedy the deficiency which gave the university the opportunity of erecting a laboratory complex with state-of-the-art equipment. It was therefore not surprising that the programmes had full accreditation status when the university invited the NUC for a re-accreditation. Apart from the fact the university had improved on its laboratory facilities, it recruited more staff and the two years it did not

admit students into the programmes forced its staff students ratio to comply with the MAS stipulations. Other examples of the impact of accreditation on universities could be seen in OAU (Law programme), ABU (accountancy programme), Ondo State University denied programmes to mention but a few.

Licensing of universities on the other hand has created the opportunity for healthy competition within the Nigerian University System. It is expected that issues relating to the quality of teaching, research and community service will be positively affected by the licensing of private universities in Nigeria.

7.4 Impact on NUC

As far as accreditation is concerned in Nigeria, the NUC is doing creditably well and the Commission's effort in this direction is not only nationally recognized but internationally acclaimed. The experience the NUC has garnered over the years in accreditation of programmes in Nigerian universities has ensured a continuous improvement in the process. Having made such progress with accreditation of undergraduate programmes, the NUC has been making preparations towards the accreditation of postgraduate programmes in the system. In addition plans are in top gear to introduce institutional accreditation in the system; thus making the accreditation system more robust.

8.0 CHALLENGES

While it could be said that the NUC accreditation system has impacted on the system positively, there is still room for improvement. The Commission needs to bring on board institutional accreditation to complement its current programme accreditation so that the entire institution could be object of focus rather than the programmes only. The modalities for achieving this is currently being worked on.

In addition, accreditation should be included in annual national budget to forestall the cost sharing of the exercise's expenditure with the universities.

The challenges of licensing of universities will be discussed from the private universities perspective. This is because the public universities have been around for sometime and have overcome some of the challenges of the private universities.

There is no doubt that the advent of private participation in the delivery of university education in Nigeria is a welcomed intervention as it is bound to decongest public universities eventually, stimulate healthy competition in the quest for quality and keep teacher/student ratios at acceptable levels and hence be assured of better performance on all the variables for quality assurance assessment. Nevertheless this intervention has come with some challenges that should be overcome to strategically position the private universities for the delivery of quality university education in Nigeria. A number of these challenges are already being tackled by the NUC through its various monitoring and advisory related activities with the licensed private universities in Nigeria. It is believed that if the tempo is sustained and the private universities adhere to the measures that have been proposed to handle the challenges, they (the challenges) will soon be a thing of the past.

8.1 Staffing

Staffing is a critical problem of the Nigerian University System today. It is amazing that the University System generates its needed manpower, but has not been able to attract them to remain in the system.

Most of the private universities in Nigeria today do not have the required quantity and quality of lecturers to take care of their teaching and research. The scenario is such that the limited academic staff in the conventional universities are being shared by the private universities, while the most of the other lecturers available in the private universities are very junior to handle serious academic activities.

To effectively handle this problem, the private Universities have been advised to step up their staff development drive so as to help the junior staff have a healthy growth within the system. In addition, some universities, especially the first generation public

universities have been encouraged lay more emphasis in postgraduate training. Presently the ratio of postgraduate to undergraduate enrolment in University of Ibadan stands at 60: 40.

8.2 Condition of Service

The Condition of Service in the Private Universities is not as secured as what is obtainable in the conventional Universities. Consequently, the private Universities are not attracting prospective staff as they should. Generally people want to work in places where there is job security.

It is believed that as the private universities find their footing in Nigeria, they will evolve better conditions of service than the ones available in the public universities. This way they will be relevant in providing healthy competition in the delivery of university education in Nigeria.

8.3 Infrastructure

A number of the Private Universities are still operating in their take off sites which are different from their permanent sites. The peculiarity of this situation is that there are no adequate infrastructures in these sites for serious academic work. Most of these institutions are just putting up the structures they have stipulated in their masterplans. If the construction works are not truncated, the private universities will soon be boasting of infrastructures that are comparable with what is available in a standard university anywhere in the world.

8.4 Implementation of Academic Brief

Before embarking on university education delivery, proprietors are mandated to prepare an academic brief which is a vital document on which hinges the academic activities and, the physical development of the university. It encompasses the philosophy aims and objectives, academic pattern, organizational structure as well as future growth and development of the university. It is therefore, pertinent that all institutional development (academic and physical) be based on the content of the Academic Brief in line with the

three key functions of the university (teaching, research and community service/Extension).

A major challenge of the private universities is the implementation of the academic brief they have prepared to guide their growth and development. The NUC monitoring however ensures that the private universities stick to the dictates of their academic brief for healthy growth.

8.5 Influence of the Proprietors

Another challenge facing private universities in Nigeria is the undue influence of some proprietors in the running of the Universities. This has not helped a number of these universities stabilize as they should. The running of a University is very peculiar because of the academic nature of the institutions and as such they should be left in the hands of professionals who understand the working of the system to manage effectively without undue interference.

8.6 Mounting of academic programmes

A number of the private universities believe that since they have listed the programmes they intend to run over a particular period in their academic briefs, they could start the programmes without approval from the NUC. This has led in some cases to the universities starting some programmes that do not have Minimum Academic Standards. Consequently the accreditation of such programmes is impossible as there is no reference document to embark on the exercise. The NUC has insisted that Universities seek necessary approval to mount programmes as the process that leads to such approvals ensures that the programmes are started on the right footing.

9.0 PROSPECTS OF PRIVATE PARTICIPATION IN THE DELIVERY OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Government before the licensing of private universities was solely responsible for the delivery of University education in Nigeria for a long time without the involvement of the private sector, even when this was not the case with the primary and the secondary levels of education. The general reform being witnessed in every sector of the Nigerian economy has further accelerated private participation in the delivery of university

education. It could therefore be said that the prospect of private universities in Nigeria is high as there are a number of pointers to this fact.

7.1 National drive towards private sector participation

There is a national drive towards private sector participation in virtually all aspects of the nation's economy today and this has also permeated the education sector. Apart from State governments that are still actively establishing universities, the Federal government has put a pause to the establishment of federal universities. This drive has triggered an increased zeal on the part of the private sector to established universities in Nigeria. This could be seen in the number of applications before the National Universities Commission for private sector participants seeking approval for the establishment of universities. This is a strong indication that there is a high prospect for private participation in the delivery of university education in Nigeria.

7.2 Recorded success of private participation at the lower levels

The success recorded by the private sector in the delivery of education at the lower levels lends credence to the prospect of private participation in the delivery of university education. It might be argued that the provision of university education is a different ball game from those of the primary and secondary levels as it is more capital intensive and the financial profit derivable is usually not immediate. It must however be noted that so far, many of the world's best universities are privately owned. The private sector could do the same in Nigeria if they maintain focus and stick to the regulations that are already in place to guide their growth and development.

7.3 Stability of academic calendar

One of the major problems of public universities in Nigeria is the instability of academic calendars. Disruption of academic calendar could be by academic or non-academic staff unions or the students over issues of funding of the universities, staff salaries and allowances, students' welfare and the likes. Since the approval granted the first set of private universities in Nigeria in 1999, there has not been any recorded case of disruption of academic calendar in any of the private universities. Consequently, a number of Nigerians that patronize them do so primarily because of the stability in the system,

which further makes the prospect of private participation in the delivery of university education in Nigeria high.

7.4 Minimal incidences of anti-social activities

Anti-social activities like cultism, sexual harassment, sorting and examination malpractices are “daily occurrences” in Nigerian public Universities. This is largely due to the freedom that students in these institutions enjoy (which they have abused) and the inadequate monitoring of staff members in the discharge of their duties. It is obvious that the private universities have learnt some lessons from the experiences of the public universities and have put measures in place to curb these excess from staff and students.

10.0 CONCLUSION

In my presentation, I have given an overview of the development of higher education in Nigeria and have discussed licensing of public (Federal and State) and private universities. The presentation has also attempted to examine the university accreditation system in Nigeria and the outlook of quality assurance in Nigerian universities vis-à-vis the achievements and challenges of the focal areas of the paper.

Taking a cursory look at the history of higher education – particularly university education in Nigeria, we can easily know where we are coming from, where we have passed through and where we are today. A number of scholars in Nigeria had the privilege of passing through the system when the universities in the country rubbed shoulders with the best in the world; when high quality expatriates academics desired to be in the scholarly environment made possible by our ivory towers; when foreign university were eager to forge collaborative links with lecturers in Nigerian universities and when our students had no problem getting placements abroad for graduate studies. The goal of the National Universities Commission is to get Nigerian Universities to levels that are comparable to if not surpass the enviable level of the past. We believe that as we keep forging on with result oriented quality assurance and strengthen our cooperation with the international community, our dream for the desired Nigerian University System will soon be realized.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

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