

Govt tasks NCHE to set standards for university programmes

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Government has tasked the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) to set minimum standards for all programmes in Ugandan universities.

Whereas there are dozens of academic programmes taught in more than 30 public and private universities in the country, *New Vision* has learnt that less than 10% of them have a minimum set standard by NCHE.

In his speech at the opening of a two-day peer review workshop on social work and administration, the director higher, technical, vocational education and training, Robert Odok Oceng said minimum standards will ensure that the products across all universities satisfy the requirement for the every academic programme.

“A minimum standard in a programme of study will help ensure competitiveness and acceptability of the graduates, and ease of mobility of students,” Odok said, adding, “This will also help ensure that the graduate has the requisite skill.”

Whereas setting minimum standards for university programmes is critical, sources at NCHE disclosed that the 2018/19 budget has zero allocation for setting the minimum standards.

New Vision has also learnt that the meagre sh5bn annual budget for NCHE which is mandated to regulate the quality of higher education in the country has made it a lame duck.

According to sources at NCHE, due to inadequate funding, universities, which need accreditation must provide funds to the agency to supervise them, resulting into delays.

Odok also tasked NCHE to come up with curricular for academic programmes, which put into consideration Uganda's National Development Plan 2020 and Vision 2040.

“This in my opinion means preparing the training and educational strategies fit for purpose,” he said.

Odok also noted that the curricular for different programmes should enable institutions to train not only for local, but also the regional and global markets.

“This is because, knowledge is universal and should therefore be comparable in terms of theoretical and practical competences that are acceptable everywhere.

The blend between training and practice needs to be emphasised at all times,” he said.

In his response, NCHE's principal higher education officer, Dr Cyprus Ssebugenyi, said NCHE only accredits programme that meet the minimum standards.

He noted that in case of emerging programmes without the minimum standards, they rely on experts in a given area of study to set them. Ssebugenyi added that sometimes they compare the minimum standards of emerging programmes with programmes in other countries.

He also noted that to ensure that the academic programmes respond to the man power demand in the country, when a university develops a new academic programme, they must call a stakeholder's meeting to see whether it tallies with the market demand.

In his speech, Dr Alex Kagume the acting executive director of NCHE, said that developing of minimum standards for the social work and social administration course is the latest initiative they have undertaken.

The stakeholders' workshop was organised to transform social work training in Uganda with the aim of helping vulnerable children majority of who are victims of HIV/AIDS.