

STREAMLINING ACCREDITATION AND ASSESSMENT OF POST O'LEVEL AND A'LEVEL PROGRAMMES IS A BIG STEP TOWARDS QUALITY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN UGANDA

In summary: In 2016, one student Sarah not real name after senior four joined one tertiary institution for certificate and later progressed and obtained a diploma awarded by the same institution. Sarah applied to do a degree at Multitech Business School and they requested her to submit certified academic documents and she ended up at UBTEB. UBTEB could not certify her documents and advised her to go her former institution for certification or go back and enroll for programmes that are nationally recognized. Sarah lost four years of her academic journey. The institution was operating outside the governing laws and regulations.

Like Sarah, there are many Ugandans moving around with fake Certificates and Diplomas awarded from unrecognized tertiary institutions. The scenario of fake post O'Level awards is no more with the establishment of assessment bodies by government of Uganda. Before the establishment of assessment bodies, many training institutions offering diplomas and certificate would teach, conduct examinations and awards Transcripts and certificate. This had a wide range of issues ranging from quality assurance issues, standardization issues and equating such qualifications. As a result the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOE&S) a put in place the Business, technical and Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) Act 2008 which among other things proposed establishment of examinations boards with mandate to conduct, regulate, streamline, coordinate and award certificate and Diploma as well as accrediting training institutions as examination centres.

Specifically, Government established 3 examinations boards under Section 26 of the BTJET Act 2008 established 3 national assessment bodies namely; Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examinations Board (UNMEB), Uganda Allied Examinations Board (UAHEB) and Uganda Business and Technical Examinations Board (UBTEB). With the establishment of these examination boards, the Ministry of Education and Sports has gained greater fame in producing competent middle level skilled works for areas of allied health, nursing, midwifery, Business, technical and specialized disciplines like cooperatives, wildlife, ICT, Fisheries, survey and lands management, meteorology studies among others.

What is the comparative advantage of national assessment?

Before the establishment of assessment/examination boards, standardization of awards was difficult since different institutions were awarding their own academic papers whose quality could not be established in terms of the level of skills acquisition, knowledge and attitudes. Therefore it was difficult for

upward academic progression of these students because universities like Makerere University could not admit such students. The world of work could not verify which academic award was genuine since different institutions were awarding these programmes using their own and unharmonised awarding systems. All students that possess certificates and awards awarded by individual institutions suffered problems of failure to upgrade academically and have been advised to repeat academic programmes to obtain national awards from respective academic Boards.

In ensuring quality assurance, regulatory bodies of various disciplines like Nursing, midwifery, engineering among others have played a critical role in ensuring greater compliance by universities and other tertiary institutions offering Post O'Level and Post A 'level Diploma programmes. This has successfully been implemented under Nurses and midwives and little progress has been registered in areas of Technical, Business and specialized programmes. The good news is that in November 2017, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued a policy guideline the accreditation and assessment of all post O'level and A'level programmes. The directive states that all post O'Level programmes must take a duration of two years and be nationally assessed by the relevant examinations bodies regardless of where they are offered from. Secondly the mandate of accrediting the Post O'level programmes is done by BTVET department in liaison with NCDC. The directive further guided that regardless of where these post O'level and Post A'level academic programmes are offered from, they must be assessed by national assessment bodies UNMEB, UAHEB and UBTEB as per their respective mandates. With these spontaneous policy shifts, there is a growing improvement and quality provision of vocational education in Uganda that will match the critical demands of the labour market. On this note, the students, parents and Head teachers of secondary schools in the whole country need to seek proper guidance on the admission requirements, duration of programmes and awarding bodies for all post O'Level programmes. Failure to comply with these regulations by any Tertiary institution or University, the relevant bodies of the MOE&S will enforce the regulations in line with the existing laws governing the education sector. As an example, the Nurses and Midwives council can't register anyone without the relevant qualification/ i.e. Certificate or Diploma awarded by UNMEB regardless of where the student trained from –tertiary institution or University.

As the result of the circular issued in November 2017, most tertiary institutions and Universities have complied with the directives contained in the MOE&S' circular. It is important that students and parents seeking admission for post O'Level and Post O'Level academic programmes to ascertain the legal status of the training institution, the awarding bodies of the qualification and authenticity of the curricular used. Such information can be ascertained from national Council for Higher education (NCHE), Higher technical Vocational

Education and Training (HTVET), Business Technical Vocational Education and Training, BTVET, District education officers (DEOs) and Assessment bodies.

Currently, the examination bodies awarding certificates and Diplomas only accredit Valid/licensed training institutions. As mandated bodies to award Diplomas and certificates, one of their functions is to accredit tertiary institutions and Universities that offer Post O'level and A'level programmes that are examined by the relevant examining bodies. In this case for example all institutions offering National certificate and Diplomas in Technical/vocation disciplines must be accredited as examination by UBTEB, all institutions offering certificate and Diploma in Nursing and midwifery must be accredited by UNMEB, Others offering allied health programmes like pharmacy, dental, clinical officers courses must be accredited by UAHEB. In executing their mandates, examining bodies work with the relevant regulatory agencies in education including NCHE, DES and NCDC as stipulated in the existing laws and because of the complementary roles they play.

Skills development fit for the industry: World of work interface is strengthened with the establishment of examinations boards. With the launching of skilling Uganda strategy in 2012 by Government of Uganda, there is greater shift in skills training from paper qualification to Skills-orientation with a bigger interface and recognition of the role of the world work in training to produce competent, dynamic and innovative graduates. In line with the National development plan on creating critical masses of technicians and craftsmen, the MOES have put much focus on hands-on training through the revised Competence based curricular for Vocational programmes which embeds industrial training, real life projects, self-paced learning, and flexibility in training and continuous assessment. In view of the current strategic interventions by Government, the plight of vocational education and training is going to be a key yardstick in provision of dynamic and innovative graduates from tertiary institutions and Universities offering post O'level business, technical and vocational programmes.

National development agenda on skills development: Strategic policy shifts implemented in education sector are a true reflection of the national commitment towards boosting and consolidating skills development synergies for production of critical manpower needed to contribute towards the growth of key sector of the economy such as manufacturing, construction, leisure and hospitality, ICT, agriculture among others as stipulated in the National development Plan II and Uganda Vision 2040. Going forward, the importance of career planning, career guidance and career support and mentorship clinics should be emphasized at difference planning and budgeting levels in order to generate a competent workforce that is in response to the much needed human resource that can support and contribute towards social economic transformation for national and individual development. Individual

Universities and tertiary institutions should aim at maximizing and nurturing the potential of students during the course of their studies. It is no longer viable to study and aim at obtaining good grades without undefined career goals and visions. This will continue to produce graduates who end up being unemployed despite having the requisite qualifications.

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