1. University World News

Working towards a shared vision of higher education (Africa)

Fears that harmonisation of higher education will involve a rigid standardisation of systems and strip them of autonomy must be addressed if greater progress is to be made towards a common quality assurance framework, according to Goski Alabi, professor of quality management and leadership at the University of Professional Studies in Accra, Ghana. Speaking at a recent webinar hosted by the AAU and the ADEA Working Group on Higher Education funded by TrustAfrica on the topic of ‘Promoting differentiation, diversification and harmonisation of African education systems’, Alabi said: “It is critical to reduce the fear in some institutions that harmonisation is going to strip them of the autonomy to regulate or control their programmes, curriculum or delivery,” adding that some authorities see it as a rigid standardisation of systems. Professor Peter A Okebukola, an expert in quality assurance in education systems and the president of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), who chaired the webinar, suggested that there was a need for legal provisions so that institutions could ‘domesticate’ agreed harmonisation and differentiation guidelines within the respective countries. Alabi said both harmonisation and differentiation were key issues in a context of commodification of higher education and the ability of institutions to set themselves up in almost any country depending on that country’s national regulations. “What programmes are being offered is something we need to examine at a continental level in relation to accreditation which is still underway,” Alabi said he said she was also concerned that Tuning Africa – a collaborative methodology for academics to develop, implement and evaluate competence-based study programmes, level descriptors and new teaching and learning methods in specific subject areas implemented under the Joint Africa-EU Strategy – was not scaled up so as to ensure that more African institutions could benefit. Alabi suggested the need to examine how technology had changed the delivery of programmes in higher education.

Read more here

2. University World News

Mergers and splits – Are we creating pseudo-universities? (Mozambique)

Globally, mergers, perhaps even more so than splits, have become a typical phenomenon in higher education systems. Attesting to this claim, there is a growing body of literature on mergers, particularly in the Western context. Usually, there is an array of reasons justifying mergers and splits of higher education institutions in various countries. Typical justifications include the need to improve efficiency, reinforce regional relevance, decentralise and stimulate diversity within the sector, reduce costs, and-or increase quality and excellence. The first merger in Mozambique announced last year involved the unification of the Higher Institute for International Relations (Instituto Superior de Relações Internacionais or ISRI) and the Higher Institute for Public Administration (Instituto Superior de Administração Pública or ISAP) into one new university to be named after the former president of Mozambique, Joaquim Alberto Chissano. Dedicated task forces to examine and lead the merger and separation process were convened and, although the task forces were given the mandate to study the conditions for the process, no reports have been made.
available to the public since their inception. Moreover, in some cases, there has been a failure to consult academic staff at affected institutions.

Task force members are retired academic and managerial staff from various universities and while some members are recognised scholars in their particular area or higher education managers, the majority are not known for their expertise in the field of higher education research. Being a retired academic or academic manager, with no obvious conflict of interest in any of the institutions involved, seems to have been the main criterion for the selection of the task force members.

Read more here

3. University World News

**Universities must explore alternative ways to fund staff (Ghana)**

In a recent University World News article, Patrick Swanzy and Francis Ansah argued vehemently against the Ghanaian government’s cut-off policy for retired lecturers/professors from public universities. The policy required all public universities to remove the names of retired contract lecturers/professors who are 60 years or older from the government payroll. As public servants, public university lecturers/professors are paid through the government payroll. The policy directive invoked the Ghanaian constitution which sets the retirement age of public servants at 60 years old, although subsection (1) of article 199 allows hiring authorities to continue the appointment of retired public servants for a period not exceeding five years. This indicates that retired university lecturers/professors who are public servants cannot be rehired in public universities or any public sector more than five years after their retirement. The policy further indicates that any public university that requires the services of contracted retired lecturers/professors must finance them through their internally generated funds rather than through the government payroll. Swanzy and Ansah argued that the implementation of the government's cut-off policy is likely to have severe negative consequences for quality university education, research output, doctoral research supervision and mentorship of younger or new faculty members. They argue that retired lecturers/professors make up for the paucity of existing lecturers/professors and allow public universities to manage the explosive growth in the student population. They add that universities "find it difficult to attract younger academics with the critical skills and knowledge needed to sustain a department or programme".

Read more here

4. University World News

**Increasing the visibility of local journals (Ethiopia)**

In 2017 the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences (EAS) published an important survey that disclosed for the first time the nature, current status and challenges of Ethiopian academic journals that publish local articles. Among other things, EAS’ empirical findings identified various challenges of journal publication in Ethiopia – such as lack of budget, shortage of submissions, poor online visibility, lack of rigour and quality, absence of international indexing, and frequent interruption (36% of the 72 Ethiopia-based journals suffer from publication interruptions extending from five to 10 years). While some of the aforementioned challenges are difficult to surmount given the financial austerity of publishers and related factors impeding research publications, others like online visibility can be managed through limited additional efforts and using accessible open platforms at institutional,
national, regional, continental or international level. According to the EAS report, most of the Ethiopian journals (45 in number) are published by public universities, followed by national professional associations (19 journals), private higher education institutions (four), government research institutes (three) and religious institutions (one). However, from among the existing 50 public universities and over 160 private higher education institutions, only one or two have their own institutional repositories. The acquisition of institutional repositories should not have been a difficult task, given the limited challenges in setting up such a platform and considering its huge importance in alleviating the existing gaps in the documentation and information dissemination practices of most higher education institutions.

Read more [here](#).

5. **University World News**

**Universities key in fighting global terror – DAAD** *(Kenya)*

Universities have a significant role to play in fighting global terror by guaranteeing solid education and boosting access to students seeking education to improve their livelihoods, according to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). While arguing that terrorism should never stop students and higher education institutions from fulfilling their mission towards personal and national development, DAAD President Professor Margret Wintermantel said in a statement sent to University World News: “Access to a solid education is a strong weapon against any form of terrorism.” This should see universities playing a greater role in combatting rising cases of extremism in students by countering radicalisation and encouraging peaceful coexistence. DAAD has been at the centre of a major project in Kenya aimed at supporting survivors of the 2015 terror attack at Garissa University, which left 142 students dead. At least 300 students of Garissa University College who survived the April terror attack have since been supported by the German government via scholarships for the continuation of their studies. Of these, 150 graduated in December 2018 at Kenya’s third largest university by student numbers, Moi University. The scholarships were awarded by DAAD and financed by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. “With this offer, we want to show our solidarity with the Kenyan students. Many of the Garissa students hail from humble backgrounds. In many cases, they are the first ones in their families or villages to ever attend university. We want to strongly encourage them to hold on to their dreams for their future, despite the horrors they went through,” said Wintermantel. The programme aims to help students to find a way back into normal life and encourage them to continue with their education.

Read more [here](#).

6. **University World News**

**Parliament pushes university to address financial flaws** *(Rwanda)*

The struggle to clear arrears of RWF14 billion (US$15.6 million) has seen a number of development and renovation projects at the University of Rwanda (UR) stalled as members of the Senate, the country’s upper house of parliament, are pushing the institution’s management to undertake practical commitments to address financial flaws. Appearing last week before the upper house of parliament, UR officials had to answer tough questions from senators on financial management and accountability of the institution, following financial concerns raised by the latest auditor general’s report. According to that report, the university (which has never had an unqualified audit) has
persistent financial problems which have negatively affected the university. The problems range from delayed or abandoned projects to contract management, accounting errors in financial statements and a failure to reconcile university bank accounts. “The audit of the University of Rwanda identified cases of three contracts which were delayed and one abandoned project contract, with a total contract value worth RWF5.7 billion (US$6.4 million)” the report, which was released in June last year, said. The projects that have been stalled since 2015 include the renovation of the African Virtual University block which was providing ICT distance learning from the college of science and technology, and the construction of the veterinary building at the college of agriculture, animal sciences and veterinary medicine. The university had also been expected to build a waste treatment plant at the same veterinary college and construct a classroom block at Rukara campus in the college of education, all in the Eastern province of the country.

Read more [here](#).

### 7. University World News

**Minister defends HE fee policy against World Bank report** (South Africa)

South African Higher Education and Training Minister Naledi Pandor had an opportunity to defend the government’s fee-free policy for poor students against recent suggestions by the World Bank that, while attractive, the policy will strain the fiscus and is “ultimately unsustainable”. Speaking during a panel discussion hosted recently by the University of Pretoria (UP) in partnership with the World Bank at the university’s new Future Africa campus, Pandor said the government has an obligation to ensure the new plan is sustainable and that it “will not reverse its decision of providing support to the poor”. A World Bank report published in January titled South Africa Economic Update: Tertiary education enrollments must rise asserts that the government’s decision to offer free tertiary education to poor, academically eligible students, to meet the national goal of doubling post-school education and training enrolment by 2030, will put a strain on the fiscus. This could result in fewer public resources to increase admission capacity in the tertiary education sector, as well as improve the quality of education. In late 2017, then-president Jacob Zuma announced the government would provide free tertiary education to the poor, following the #FeesMustFall protests that affected the country in 2016. However, questions have been raised about how sustainable the provision of free education will be. The World Bank report looked at how to expand student enrolments in post-school education and training in a bid to upskill South Africa’s youth and thereby reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Read more [here](#).

### 8. University World News

**Crackdown on illegal universities – Academics speak out** (Nigeria)

As the Nigerian government announces its intention to crack down on illegal universities, questions are being raised by academics about how they were able to proliferate in the first place, the impact of their closure on thousands of desperate students, and what the government should be doing to improve quality across the entire sector. On 27 January, Education Minister Malam Adamu Adamu announced at a press conference in Abuja that 68 illegal and unaccredited universities – both those with physical premises and those with online “affiliations” to substandard foreign institutions – would be shut down and demolished. Their owners would also be apprehended and prosecuted, he
said. “The proliferation of these institutions has made the job of regulatory agencies in the sector very difficult. Such institutions also default in taxes. They do not keep to the rules of the game. They have no admission quota, they run unaccredited courses with practically no standards, their products are half-baked and unemployable,” he was quoted as saying. Some academics are asking if closing down “illegal” universities is the answer, in view of the inability of Nigeria’s current legally-established universities to absorb the number of school leavers wanting places. Over the past five years, secondary school leavers seeking admission into higher education have increased to reach almost two million annually. According to the National Universities Commission, there are 600,000 places in all public and private higher education institutions. Thus the numbers of applicants far outstrip the enrolment capacity of existing approved tertiary institutions. According to Professor Alex Ekpeyong of the dentistry department at the University of Calabar, the closure of illegal institutions will mean that thousands of young people will be denied access to higher education — in violation of the country’s Constitution.

Read more [here](#)

9. University World News

**Quality assurance guidelines await ministerial approval (Africa)**

Guidelines for quality assurance in African higher education, aimed at increasing access to quality education while addressing social development and employability, are ready for use but await endorsement by ministers of higher education in Africa, either in 2019 or 2020 when they meet for the continental meetings. Only after endorsement can the African Standards and Guidelines (ASG-QA) be launched but that does not stop the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative consortium and other higher education players from disseminating them, Dr Violet Makuku, the quality assurance specialist and initiative project officer told University World News last week. Funded by the European Union from its joint political partnership with the African Union, the HAQAA initiative consortium includes the Association of African Universities, the University of Barcelona, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the European University Association. The initiative was established to support the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional level, national, regional and Pan-African level, according to the initiative’s website. The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA) were initially designed under the African Union Commission’s Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). “This harmonisation would enable and enhance more student and staff mobility through recognition of qualifications, certificates and diplomas as well as the formulation of similar promotion criteria for faculty,” said Makuku.

Read more [here](#)
10. University World News

**Developing data and leadership skills to fight poverty** *(Africa- Transformative Leadership Series by Mastercard Foundation)*

John Wanjiku, 24, comes from a poor family in Kihoya village, Murang’a County, a tea growing area of central Kenya, where farmers like his parents typically earn a modest living from growing tea on a strip of land and from growing their own vegetables. Without a scholarship it would be difficult for most young people from this type of background to make it to university, but Wanjiku is one of the lucky ones. Via the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program he has been supported through higher education at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, one of the country’s top research institutions, studying first for a BCom and now for a BA Honours in IT, specialising in information systems. Now he is putting that knowledge to good use to help with one of his community’s perennial problems. He has developed a mobile phone application that he calculates could save Kenyan farmers back home more than KES33 million ($330,000) a month. Wanjiku’s family in Kihoya, like many of the 565,000 tea farmers in his homeland, lose more than 40 kilogrammes a year of harvested tea due to delivery lorries not collecting their crop at the right time from the collection centres. On his course, he has been studying business intelligence and the importance of collecting large amounts of data to be able to look at trends over time and identify problems at different levels – nationally, regionally and by branch, for instance – that the business should address. “With the tea problem, we were trying to capture data on delivery time, so that in future we can predict with accuracy what is happening, where and how. It is about coming up with a model that will use data to predict the optimal way to collect tea,” he says.

Read more [here](#).

---

**Note to Editors/PROs:**

To share news/events about your Universities, contact;

**Name:** Maureen Agena  
**Corporate Communication & Advocacy Officer**

**Email:** communications@ruforum.org