1. University World News

**Universities turn to dual mode to enhance higher education access (Morocco)**

The government of Morocco has approved a virtual universities plan which will effectively convert the country’s traditional universities to dual mode universities offering distance learning programmes alongside on-campus teaching, in a bid to enhance university access and reduce overcrowding. The first two virtual universities will be opened next academic year at the University of Ibn Tofail in Kénitra and the University of Ibn Zohr in Agadir, to serve as a model to be adopted or replicated at other public universities in Morocco. The virtual universities project was unveiled by Moroccan Secretary of State to the Minister of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Khalid Al Samadi, according to a 22 February news report published by Alyaoum 24. The virtual universities project is the first step in implementing the Morocco digital transformation strategy which aims at improving access to the internet, reducing the digital divide by 50%, promoting the development of digital professionals and positioning Morocco as a digital hub in French-speaking Africa. The virtual universities will use a blended learning approach, combining traditional classroom lectures and online courses as recommended by a 2018 journal paper on MOOCs (massive open online courses) which argued for the adoption of “a blended learning approach that combines both online and face-to-face experiences to optimise learning in Moroccan higher education”. Morocco’s higher education institutions currently suffer from severe overcrowding, lack of infrastructure and a shortage of professors. According to a report published last year by the Supreme Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research (SCETSR), which calls for the digitisation of higher education, the student to staff ratio is 173, 87 and 35 students per teacher in law, arts and social studies, and scientific studies respectively. The SCETSR report indicated that about 54% of students drop out, particularly in the country’s 56 public open-access institutions (attended by 88% of the country’s students) where there is low pedagogical supervision in relation to the number of students. According to the report a university seat is available for every 211 students for open-access institutions, and a seat for every 67 students in universities with limited access. The dual university proposal has been welcomed in some quarters. Read more [here](#).

2. University World News

**SADC meeting agrees on need for STEM in industrialization (Africa)**

Higher education curricula in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) must pivot on science, technology and innovation if industrialisation of the region is to be achieved, as envisaged in the bloc’s Industrialisation Strategy and Roadmap 2063. This emerged from the first SADC regional conference of vice-chancellors and deans of education, science and technology; policymakers; ministers of education and training, science, technology and innovation; and development partners that took place in the resort town of Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe last month. Speaking at the meeting attended by about 150 delegates, guest of honour, Zimbabwe’s Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development, Professor Amon Murwira, said modern
education systems and universities must be designed to improve the quality of life through producing superior goods and services. “In order to produce goods and services, the universities in the 21st century must shift focus from only analysis to analysis and creation. We should design our systems so that they produce the goods and services,” Murwira said. “We can’t move forward using a wrong or misplaced design. Our universities have largely focused on teaching, research and community service but this was not meant to produce goods and services; hence, education has not resulted in any direct development of industries.” Murwira said no matter how many STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – universities teach, industrialisation would not happen with the wrong education system design.

Read more here

3. University World News

Teaching vs research – A real tension for young scholars (Africa)

Tension between the dual functions of teaching and research in African universities is having a negative impact on the prospects of young African scientists, according to Professor Johann Mouton, director of the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Speaking at the opening of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) Young Scholars in Africa Conference which took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 1-3 March, Mouton said the notion that teaching and research functions should supplement each other seems more like a paradox than an ideal in many African universities. “At both individual and institutional levels in Africa, we observe tension, contradiction and even conflict between these two core academic functions, which systematically impacts more negatively on the research careers of young, relatively inexperienced (and powerless) scientists. A strong emphasis on quantifiable research outputs is often out of touch with the daily realities with which lecturers and senior lecturers are faced,” said Mouton. Mouton is the co-editor, along with Canadian social scientist Professor Catherine Beaudry (Polytechnique Montréal) and Professor Heidi Prozesky (also from CREST), of The Next Generation of Scientists in Africa, published late last year and based on four years of study into what influences research performance and development of young scientists from more than 50 African countries. He said among the key challenges faced by lecturers in most universities were weak scientific institutions. This manifested in fragile research centres and institutes, non-sustainable scientific journals, ineffectual scientific societies and academies of science, huge dependence on international funding for research and development, and individualism in research rather than institution-building. Another weak point was government expenditure. “The one area where African science has not turned the tide is government expenditure on research and development,” said Mouton, adding that most African countries spend less than 0.5% of their gross domestic product on research and development, which is low as compared with developed countries that have advanced in the field of science. According to Mouton, Africa’s research publication output was dominated by a small number of countries. Nine countries (South Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Nigeria, Morocco, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia) produce 80% of total output, he said.

Read more here
4. Standard Digital

**Excitement and fear as new education minister named (Kenya)**

The nomination of Professor George Magoha to head the Kenyan Ministry of Education has sent shockwaves across sector players, with notable excitement and fear in equal measure, writes Augustine Oduor for the Standard. Known for his no-nonsense style of leadership, Magoha faces an uphill task of steering reforms in the delicate ministry. Quality education controls, under-funding in schools and universities, delayed release of capitation money to schools and the perennial strikes by teachers are just some of the issues he will be confronted with once he assumes office. Vice-chancellors who spoke to the Saturday Standard said they are headed for times of hard, abrasive reforms, as Magoha understands the university sector, having served as a vice-chancellor of the University of Nairobi. “We know he is a firm leader, so there are fears, but he can only do what he has to do within the law,” said one of the vice-chancellors.

Read more [here](#).

5. University World News

**Job survey shows need for debate on graduate quality (Zimbabwe)**

A new survey of potential graduate employers has recommended that Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning shift focus from the quantity of graduates they produce to quality – a matter that requires national debate to ensure a paradigm shift. The survey, conducted by a local research consultancy Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, was tasked with gauging the perceptions of employers with regard to the quality of graduates coming out of local universities and state-run universities ahead of private or church-run institutions of higher learning. The survey follows a 2013 study which found that graduates were taking an average of seven years to find employment.

The survey found that graduates from state universities were rated higher than other universities. For commerce graduates, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) came out highest followed by the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Midlands State University (MSU). For science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, the National University of Science and Technology topped the ratings, followed by UZ and the Harare Institute of Technology (HIT). In the social sciences, UZ came first, followed by MSU and Africa University. For work ethics, NUST topped the list followed by UZ and MSU, the survey said. The survey noted that graduates from the Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo and Bindura State University scored the lowest in a test of verbal reasoning, which is the ability to understand and logically work through concepts and problems expressed in words. Verbal reasoning tests tell employers how well a candidate can extract and work with meaning, information and implications from text. This implies that graduates scoring low on verbal reasoning may find it difficult to express themselves verbally, which is also likely to affect the quality of written reports they produce. The survey said the results show that universities need to pay attention to the quality of graduates they are producing to enable the graduates to be absorbed by industry, as employer perceptions matter in recruitment. Researchers asked in the report whether universities could be persuaded to focus on quality of graduates instead of quantity. “This is something that needs national debate to guide higher education development,” the survey said.

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

**Educationists call for more funding for basic sciences (Uganda)**

Educationists in Uganda called for more funding for the basic sciences of chemistry, biology, physics and geology last month, amid an ongoing decline in student interest in pursuing these in favour of applied sciences. The call was made at an innovation meeting organised by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology in Kampala, which sought to explore ways to facilitate research and innovation including the possibility of doubling domestic funding rather than relying on foreign donors. A number of scientists such as Professor Sandy Stevens Tickodri-Togboa, lead researcher for the Kiira EV project, attended the meeting. “We are already witnessing a shortage in personnel on the continent with a deeper understanding of the subjects. Soon, it is going to be worse,” said Enos Kiremire, a retired professor of organic chemistry in Kampala who taught at the University of Namibia. Kiremire told University World News more students were inclined today to pursue medicine, agriculture or engineering at undergraduate level rather than the basic sciences. This has to change or at least a “balance” should be sought, he said. He called on African governments to “more than double” their funding for the sciences to motivate prospective scientists to study and forge careers in the sciences.

“It’s a big challenge,” he said, singling out Uganda – which has more than 40 universities but has no registered patent with the World Intellectual Property Organization. “You cannot discover new formulas and innovations unless you delve deeper into the subject,” said Kiremire.

Read more [here](#).

7. University World News

**Minister calls for investment in science and R&D (Angola)**

The Angolan Minister of State Frederico Cardoso has called on universities to invest in scientific research for sustainable development and new technologies. Speaking in Moçâmedes at the start of the 2019 academic year, Cardoso, who is also head of the president’s civil affairs office, said that as well as the government’s plans to increase budgets for research and development institutions within a complex financial environment, new partnerships must be established with foundations, donors and philanthropic organisations to develop scientific initiatives for Africa, according to an Agência Angola Press (ANGOP) report. He said the recent publication of a new statute for scientific researchers and a development project for science and technology, funded by the African Development Bank, were initiatives which drew more attention to the country’s research and development sector. Scientific research and technological innovation must be linked to the production process under the leadership of the state, with the private sector involved in the funding of its own institutions, in financing research activities and the establishment of public-private partnerships, said Cardoso. “We must continue to invest seriously in improving the quality of education, training and research for innovation if we want to build and increase sustainably in an economy which is not dependent on oil,” he said. It was important to transform universities and other higher education institutions into genuine pillars of the national innovation system if they wanted to succeed in promoting economic growth founded on international trade of intensive knowledge-based goods and services, he said.

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

Vice-chancellors’ fee hike call – Students threaten action (Kenya)

Students have threatened to strike if the call by Kenyan university vice-chancellors for tuition fees for government-sponsored students to be tripled this year goes ahead. The Kenyan Vice-Chancellors' Committee presented the proposal to the parliamentary Committee on Education in a meeting called by parliamentarians on 22 February to discuss the status of higher education in Kenya. The meeting brought together the top management of public and private universities, representatives from the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), the Commission for University Education, Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service, and the Universities Funding Board. The university chiefs want the current annual fees of KES16,000 (US$160) per government-sponsored student increased to KES48,000 (US$480) per student annually, effective from September 2019. In response, students issued a seven-day strike notice. Addressing journalists in Nairobi on 25 February, student representatives threatened that students would storm the streets if the proposal was approved. They also objected to the call during the launch of HELB’s strategic plan 2019-23 on 20 February by Kenya’s then cabinet secretary for education, science and technology, Amina Mohamed, to have defaulters of HELB loans arrested.

However, universities, especially public institutions, are experiencing a cash crisis and cannot carry out their core mandates, according to vice-chancellors. “We need to ensure that universities are fully funded so as to fulfil their mandate of teaching, research and service to the community,” Professor Francis Aduol, vice-chancellor of Technical University of Kenya

Read more [here](#)

9. University World News

Uganda Christian University wants government to waive taxes on private institutions (Uganda)

Uganda Christian University (UCU) has urged government to waive taxes including VAT and income tax on private institutions to enable them invest in academics to boost quality. "I call it injustice for the government to over tax private institutions and this should be looked at," the university vice chancellor Rev Canon Dr John Ssenyonyi has said. Dr Ssenyonyi said a large number of students are in private universities and they too deserve to benefit from education grants, subsidies, scholarships and guardians benefits. He made the remarks during the university’s graduation ceremony in Mukono on Friday. He said private institutions do not have access to government funds but rely mainly on tuition fees and bank loans that attract abnormally high interest rates from banks to develop and grow. Dr. Ssenyonyi also said government universities on the other hand enjoy subsidies which he thinks is good and only natural that government assists them."Such assistance to private universities should also be normal and natural after all taxes paid by Ugandans are the same that are used by the government to subsidise public universities," Dr Ssenyonyi said.He also warned students against undermining job opportunities and said their attitude should be to learn.

Read more [here](#)
10. Kenyatta University
Kenyatta University lost two academic staff in ET 302 Plane Crush (Kenya)

On behalf of the Chancellor, University Council, the Management Board and the entire KU family, it is with profound sorrow and grief that I announce the passing of Prof. Agnes M. W. Gathumbi, Director of Teacher Professional Development and Dr. Isaac Mwangi Minae, lecturer, Department of Educational Communication and Technology. Both were on the Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET302 destined for Nairobi after attending to official duties in Italy. The aircraft crashed shortly after take off from Addis Ababa. Our thoughts and prayers go out to their families, friends, entire KU fraternity and all those who have suffered loss at this very painful time.

Prof. Paul K. Wainaina
Vice-Chancellor

Note to Editors/PROs:

To share news/events about your Universities, contact;

Name: Maureen Agena
Corporate Communication Advocacy & Officer

Email: communications@ruforum.org