

**FIFTY YEARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN
NIGERIA: TRENDS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE**

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Abstract

Quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the education system. In this paper, we reviewed the trend in quality assurance in higher education in the Nigerian higher education system over the last 50 years, with special focus on the universities.

In order to gain deeper insight into the trends in quality assurance since 1960, eleven former Vice-Chancellors, nine emeritus professors and eighteen serving professors who had offered service for upwards of 20 years were surveyed to rate the quality assurance process of the Nigerian university system over ten-year intervals from 1948 to 2010. The clusters of interest were (a) student admission process; (b) staff appointments and promotions; (c) external examiner system; (d) visitation process; and (e) accreditation process. The process of admitting students was adjudged, on the average, to be above 80% in quality between 1948 and 1960. A steady depreciation crept in from 1970 to 2000 where a 54% mean score was recorded. A rise to 66% was noted for 2010. The study showed that from 1960 to 1980, staff appointment and promotion processes were assured to range impressively between 75% and 84%. However by 1990, a drop to 63% had occurred, further dropping to an all-time low of 43% in 2010. The external examiner system was reported to be strong and respectable from 1960 to 1990. From 1990 to date, a significant drop in quality rating was recorded to a low of 40% in 2010. The survey sample adjudged the visitation process in the Nigerian university system from when data was available (1980) to be of good quality (mean of 75%). The accreditation process was rated high (73% by 2010).

In 50 years, the quality assurance process improved steadily. Improvement in quality of graduates from the system was found to mismatch the quality assurance efforts. This calls for invigoration of the quality assurance activities at the federal and state levels. In this connection, recommendations were made for establishment of a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System; subscription to international quality standards; improved resourcing of NUC, NBTE and NCCE; establishment of State Quality Assurance Agencies; effective use of ICT in quality assurance; and the setting up of a quality observatory for the higher education system.

As we celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the nation's independence, it is important to reflect on the importance of high-level human resources that the higher education system provides and the need to foster quality in the system. We must march resolutely forward on this road since this is one of the pathways to achieving our goal of being one of the 20 leading economies by 2020.

Acknowledgement

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The Nigerian university system acknowledges the superb contributions of Professor Julius Okojie, as Executive Secretary, National Universities Commission, to elevating the quality assurance profile of the Commission and his doggedness in combating degree mills.

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Preamble

The Nigerian higher education community joins in the golden jubilee celebration of the anniversary of independence of our nation. The Association of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (AVCNU), stimulated by University of Ilorin and under the auspices of the National Universities Commission, has put this conference together as one of the events to mark the 50th independence anniversary. We applaud the initiative of the conference which will afford us the opportunity to cast a view at the rear-view mirror and see how far we have travelled down the higher education road. In fifty years, what achievements can be chalked up for higher education and in which areas have we faltered? What lessons have we learned so that at the centenary celebration, we should have a higher education system that better responds to national needs and global developments.

In the last three months, a preponderance of media reports voted in favour of not celebrating Nigeria at 50 on account of huge developmental challenges. Yet, strident calls by a respectable proportion of the citizenry endorse a modest celebration of the anniversary pitching their position on the popular view that “you are 50 only once; so celebrate”. For us in the Nigerian higher education system, being witnesses to when the country is 50, makes us witnesses to history. This paper is immersed within this celebration mode and addresses 50 years of quality assurance of the Nigerian higher education system, with a focus on universities.

Introduction

The developmental history of quality assurance in higher education in Nigeria began in 1939 when the colonial administration instituted a panel to review the programmes offered in Yaba Higher College, the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria. In Taiwo's (1982) account, the then Governor-General was responding to public comments about the quality of technical personnel that the college was producing. Fears were being expressed that the colonial government was implementing a deliberate policy to ensure that locally produced middle-level human resource from the college was of poor quality when compared with those trained in equivalent institutions in the UK. The report of the panel led to a review of the curriculum of the Yaba Higher College in 1942 (Okebukola, Shabani, Sambo and Ramon-Yusuf, 2007).

By 1948, the colonial administration opened up the first university-level institution in the country as a college of the University of London. University College, Ibadan was operated with the academic framework of the University of London including its quality assurance practices. To assure equivalence with London degrees, the delivery and evaluation methods at Ibadan were patterned largely after, and regulated by the University of London. After independence in 1960, Ibadan which later weaned as University of Ibadan maintained the internal quality assurance culture that it imbibed from its former parent university.

At independence in 1960, a handful of institutions including University of Ibadan and University of Nigeria, Nsukka with a total enrolment of less than 2000, made up the higher education system in Nigeria. By 2010, the number of universities had risen to 104 with a pooled student enrolment of about 1.5 million. The total graduate output from the system during the 50-year period is estimated to be about 8.5 million. When combined with research output in the form of published books and articles, patents and inventions as well as community engagement, the system, assuredly, delivered with an eye on quality. While the pursuit of quality was the goal, the extent to

which this goal was attained failed to fully meet expectations. The major thrust of this paper is to describe the trend in quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system over the last 50 years and forecast the future of the process.

The quest for improved quality has developed momentum over the last 50 years. Rising public demand for better performance of higher education institutions, enrolment pressure, efficiency and accountability demands, the need for better quality graduates to drive the economy, dwindling public resources for higher education and the increasing cross-border provisions are some of the major drivers of this momentum.

Quality assurance, the central theme of this paper, is a label for the process of ensuring fitness for purpose. It emerged strongly in the education lexicon in the mid-1930s. Consensus has built around defining it as fitness for purpose. In the last ten years, an upwelling of interest has grown around it at national and global levels, leading to the establishment of over 2300 agencies and networks which have quality assurance as core mandate.

In Nigeria, three national regulatory agencies are statutorily empowered to quality assure the higher education system. These are the National Universities Commission (NUC)- established in 1964; the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) –established in 1977; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education, established in 1989. The laws setting up higher education institutions superintended by these agencies accord the institutions concurrent powers to ensure quality of process, products and services.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance is an umbrella concept for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of input, process and output of the higher education system. Figure 1 summarises the component elements of quality assurance. As the figure shows, quality assurance is not accreditation as some erroneously conceive. Accreditation is one of the activities in quality assurance.

Quality assurance has components internal and external to the institution. Internal quality assurance includes the internal examiner system and internal academic and management audit. An institution engages in these activities to assure itself that it is on course to fulfilling its vision and mission in terms of quality of input, process and output. External validation of institutional quality assurance is often necessary in the desire to norm that institution with others with the same vision and mission. Agents external to the university are players in the external quality assurance system. The key activities are accreditation, periodic monitoring and evaluation by NUC, visitation and external institutional audit. The quality assurance process examines the effectiveness and efficiency of the input, process and output elements of the teaching, learning, research and service activities of a higher education institution. For instance, the quality of products can be measured by how well the graduates are being prepared to serve society and for meeting the challenges of the world of work. It can be judged through ascertaining how efficient the teachers are, and the adequacy of the facilities and materials needed for effective teaching and learning. The utility value of quality assurance can be seen through the provision of information to the public and other interested parties about the worth of the higher education delivery system. It equally ensures accountability in respect of the investment of public funds (Okebukola, et al, 2007).

A systems approach to quality assurance demands that dimensions of input, process and output should be the focus. The input segment includes students, teachers, curriculum and facilities. On the process side, emphasis is on teaching/learning interactions, internal efficiency, research, evaluation procedure and management practices. The output includes the quality of graduates as well as the system's external efficiency.

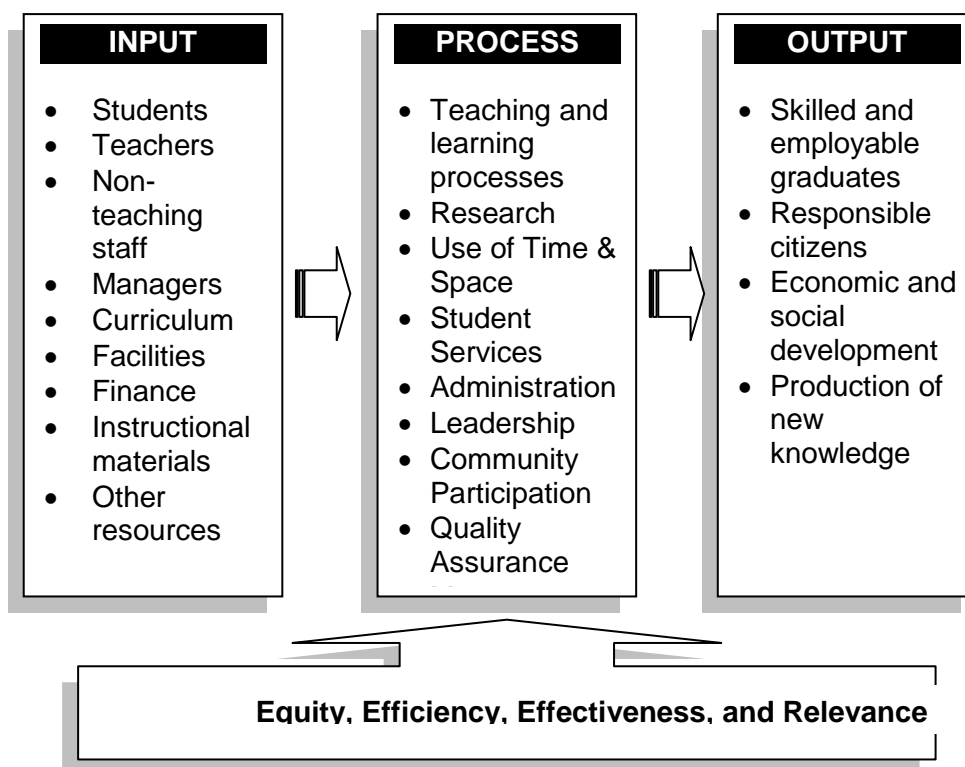


Figure 1: Dimensions of quality assurance

We should now describe in some detail, examples of some of the dimensions.

Input dimension – students: The quality of candidates aspiring to have university education is a core element in consideration of the quality of graduates. Six credits (including English and Mathematics) in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) is the minimum qualification for entry into degree programmes. Candidates sit for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), formerly Universities Matriculation Examination (UME). UTME scores form the basis of admission into universities. A UTME score is set as the national cut-off point. Only SSCE candidates attaining this score or higher are eligible for admission into undergraduate programmes.

Beyond the minimum national cut-off, universities are at liberty to set cut-off marks for specific programmes and conduct post-UTME. The quality of candidates finally admitted is based on the thoroughness of the conduct of the UTME and post-UTME.

Input dimension- teachers: In all higher education institutions in the region, teacher quality is addressed first at the point of recruitment and subsequently through evaluation for promotion and in-service training. The minimum academic standards for staffing provide for minimum qualifications for appointment and for promotion. To progress from one lecturer grade to another through promotion, minimum scores for teaching and research have been set with local variations applied at the level of the university. A PhD is required for appointment and promotion to lectureship positions.

Input dimension- facilities: Minimum standards have been set for all major facilities in the universities notably classrooms, library, laboratories workshops and offices. Apart from space, standards for equipment and furniture are also set for these facilities. It is against these standards, that the quality of facilities is assessed.

Input dimension- curriculum: As part of the minimum academic standards (MAS), minimum content load is specified for the curriculum. Core courses that must be passed regardless of university the student attends are specified as part of this minimum curriculum content. The expectation is that universities will add to this minimum to further enrich their curriculum. In practice, most universities adopt the minimum with the claim that what is regarded as minimum is loaded enough to be maximum. NUC has taken steps to continually update MAS in response to national and global developments.

Process dimension: The transactions in classrooms, laboratories and workshops are hardly subjected to direct quality check. Teaching/learning is assessed indirectly through student assessment of their lecturers and performance of students at the end of the course. During accreditation visits, accreditors are expected to sit in live classrooms or observe laboratory work in progress. This cross-sectional view is the best that can be achieved in the circumstance.

The accreditation process

Accreditation can be broadly defined as a process leading to the granting of approval or authority to a programme or institution after meeting a set of minimum standards or criteria. The process of accreditation begins with the establishment of a set of minimum standards against which programmes are evaluated. Secondly, a panel of experts evaluates the performance of the programme against the standards. Thirdly, a decision is taken based on the accreditation status whether to permit continued operation of the programme, make minor adjustments to it or cause the programme to be suspended. The process of programme accreditation by NUC over the last 20 years will now be sketched under three headings: pre-accreditation, accreditation and post accreditation phases.

Pre-accreditation activities: As stated earlier, a major pre-accreditation activity is the setting of minimum academic standards against which to measure the performance of a programme. The first system-wide and comprehensive development of the minimum academic standards was undertaken in 1990. Through an inclusive stakeholder participatory process, minimum standards were set for students input, staff input, facilities input, course content, course delivery and evaluation system. The MAS is at the heart of the evaluation instrument used by accreditation panels (see Ramon-Yusuf, 2003).

For a programme to merit entry into the accreditation process, it should have been approved by the National Universities Commission. The approval is preceded by a feasibility study and assent by University Senate as well as successful resource verification by the National Universities Commission. The programme is run for two years to mature for accreditation. The mature programmes and those with expired accreditation certificate as well as programmes with denied accreditation whose deficiencies are remedied are presented to NUC for accreditation or re-accreditation.

On the receipt of the list of programmes for accreditation from the universities, NUC forwards self-study forms for completion. This affords the universities the opportunity to assess their programmes or the entire institution against the minimum academic standards and take last minute corrective actions. Completed self study forms are returned to NUC as working document for the accreditation panels.

Two groups of institutions/agencies are empowered by law to conduct programme accreditation in Nigerian Universities. The first is the National Universities Commission. Professional bodies and registration councils make up the second group. The group, through specialised accreditation processes, ensures that products from most of the professional programmes meet specified output behaviours for practice. For instance, the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria accredits NUC-approved medical programmes for the purpose of ensuring that medical graduates are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for practice of medicine in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. The same is true for the Council for the Registration of Engineers (COREN) with responsibility for accrediting engineering programmes and the Council for Legal Education for law programmes. There are sixteen of such professional bodies and registration councils that conduct specialised accreditation for NUC-approved programmes. Each of these bodies is empowered by its enabling law to conduct accreditation. If the professional body fails to grant accreditation to a programme, graduates from such programme though accredited by NUC, will not be registrable for practice.

Whereas NUC takes responsibility for accreditation of all programmes offered in Nigerian Universities, only about a quarter of the programmes are subjected to specialised accreditation by professional bodies. In response to the complaint of accreditation visit overload by Vice-Chancellors, NUC and many of the professional bodies have adopted joint accreditation exercises when panels from NUC and the professional bodies concurrently conduct accreditation during a single rather than dual visit.

The major steps in the accreditation process are:

1. Communication to NUC by the university of intention to mount a programme after feasibility study.
2. NUC checks alignment of programme with national need and global relevance. On satisfactory fit, a resource assessment team is sent to the university.
3. Upon satisfactory resource assessment, NUC grants formal approval for the running of the programme.
4. Two years into the life of the programme, it is deemed mature for accreditation. An accreditation panel is commissioned to evaluate the programme.
5. Based on the quality of the programme and its delivery in relation to the Minimum Academic Standards, accreditation is assessed as FULL, INTERIM or DENIED.

Running alongside the processing of self-study forms is the composition of accreditation panels. Membership of the panels is limited to full professors in the discipline with track record of objectivity, integrity and non-compromising of 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 NUC accreditation panels. The leader of each panel is elected from among members. He/she is usually the most senior professor with experience in the business of accreditation (Okebukola, et al, 2005).

With the panel in place, a coordinating meeting is held to induct new members into and refresh the old about the mechanisms of the accreditation process. Usually a full-day event which begins with presentations on the philosophical and procedural framework for accreditation, the exercise proceeds into sessions where the assessment instruments are discussed. In a step-by-step manner, accreditors are worked through every item on the assessment instruments. The meaning of each item relative to the minimum standard to be measured and the procedure for scoring are explained in detail. After panel members have attained a high degree of fluency in the use of the instruments, simulation exercises are then carried

out. During such exercises, scenarios of hypothetical cases of what can be found on ground during accreditation visits are presented for scoring. Scores of panel members are debated and harmonised. The simulation exercise continues until the differential between the scores of all panel members on each item in the assessment instrument is reduced to the barest minimum. The thrust of the entire exercise is to enhance inter-rated reliability. At the close of the coordination meeting, the panels depart for their accreditation sites. It is ensured that, as much as possible, no member offers service within 300 km of his/her university catchment.

At the accreditation site, the panel meets with the Vice-Chancellor and then the Dean of Faculty, head of department and staff of the programme to be evaluated. After the introductory meeting, the panel settles down to work for two days assessing the 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 course of the two days. At the end of the visit, the panel writes its report which is discussed with the programme staff and the Vice-Chancellor. It is mandatory to secure the comments and signature of the Vice-Chancellor or representative on the report. The report along with the quantitative assessment of the programme and recommendations as to accreditation status earned are sent to NUC.

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

NUC also takes steps to compute the cost of remedying deficiencies of programme with denied accreditation. The information is conveyed to the proprietor and management of the university for further necessary action. Universities that have several denied programmes are encouraged to consult NUC regarding the action to be taken on such programmes. The report from the panels which include lessons learned and recommendations for improving the accreditation process is also a major post-accreditation activity.

As Okojie (2008) noted:

- the NUC accreditation system stands out in the African continent as a very robust system;
- the first accreditation exercise organised by the NUC in 1990 was unprecedented in the African continent;
- to add more credibility to the exercise, a team of experts in various academic fields from different African countries participated in the November 2008 Accreditation exercise as international monitors; and
- instruments were developed for ODL undergraduate (Ibadan, Lagos, Abuja, NOUN) programmes which were used for the eventual accreditation of this mode of learning.

There has been a progressive improvement in the performances of universities in accreditation exercises as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Trends in accreditation status of programmes in Nigerian universities

Year of Accreditation	Number of programmes accredited	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%)

2007	1,110	749 (67.5%)	332 (29.9%)	29 (2.6%)
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Source: Okojie (2008). Briefing document for the Honourable Minister of Education

NUC successfully carried out academic programmes audit of the Nigerian University System. The exercise made it possible for the Commission to know the number of programmes and their status

Number of programmes in NUS - 2936
 Number of approved programmes - 2605
 Number of unapproved programmes - 331
 Approved Affiliation - 6 with 5 Universities as follows

- College of Education, Ondo affiliated with O.A.U Ile-Ife
- Rivers State College of Education, Omoku affiliated with University of Ibadan
- Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri affiliated with University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- Federal College of Education, Zaria affiliated with A.B.U. Zaria
- Federal College of Education, Kano affiliated with A.B.U. Zaria
- Kaduna Polytechnic affiliated with FUT, Minna
- There are 91 unapproved affiliations in 13 Universities

The trend in quality assurance within the Nigerian higher education system with focus on universities will now be addressed.

Trends in quality assurance in the Nigerian university system

At independence in 1960, University College, Ibadan basked under the shadow of the internal quality assurance system of its superintending university- University of London. University of London had over 170-year history of quality assuring its input, process and products. Its affiliate college at Ibadan benefitted from the oversight since the goal was to run a university college and produce graduates that are not below the standards of the University of London. Students were admitted into University of Ibadan based strictly on impressive performance in the Higher School Certificate and General Certificate of Education Advanced level. Available spaces were far short of the number of qualified applicants hence only the top-scoring

candidates were creamed from the pack. In 1960, over 3000 candidates applied to the university. Admission was offered to less than 240.

Between 1960 and 1962, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Nigeria, Nsukka were added to the list followed by University of Benin in 1970 to make up what is now known as the first generation universities. In these universities, internal quality assurance through stringent admission conditions, appointment and promotion criteria, monitoring of the curriculum delivery and evaluation process was patterned along the lines of well-rated universities in Europe and North America.

With regard to appointment and promotion, in the first two decades after independence, the first and second generation universities applied criteria which ensured that good quality teachers, administrators and technical personnel from anywhere in the world were appointment. Better funding of the universities which translated to good quality working environment and attractive welfare scheme fostered the staying power of such international staff. Promotion was also based on well-established international standards. Thus, quality of staff was assured through a regime of transparent and objectively applied criteria for appointment and promotion that was in line with good practices in reputable universities in Europe and North America.

Another amplification worth making is that of the external examiner system. This system ensures that the quality of the examination process was high and anticipated to be a good proxy for the curriculum delivery process. External examiners were top-rate scholars drawn from highly reputable universities within and outside Nigeria. The quality of the external examination system was high. This kept university teachers on their toes with regard to keeping faith with curriculum delivery.

In order to gain deeper insight into the trends in quality assurance since 1960, eleven former Vice-Chancellors, nine emeritus professors and eighteen serving professors who had offered service for upwards of 20 years were asked to rate the quality assurance process of the

Nigerian university system over ten-year intervals from 1948 to 2010. The clusters of interest were (a) student admission process; (b) staff appointments and promotions; (c) external examiner system; (d) visitation process; and (e) accreditation process. The findings of the study which are reported in full in Okebukola (2010a) are summarised below.

Trends in student quality assurance: The process of admitting students was adjudged, on the average, to be above 80% in quality between 1948 and 1960 (see Figure 3). A steady depreciation crept in from 1970 to 2000 where a 54% mean score was recorded. A rise to 66% was noted for 2010.

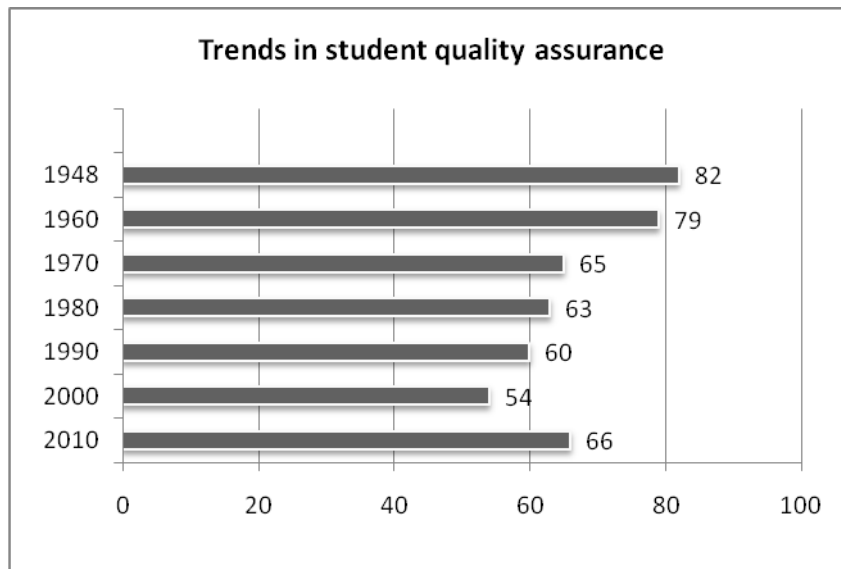


Fig. 3: Trends in student quality assurance

Participants in the study explained the drop from 1960 to 2000 to, among other factors, the increase in the number of universities leading to a motley assortment of admission processes especially by state universities with their unapproved satellite campuses. Another reason offered is the malpractices engaged in by UME candidates, thus compromising the quality of candidates admitted into the universities. The spurt of improvement in the process recorded for

2010 was added to the post-UME (now post-UTME) screening which was instituted in 2004.

Trends in staff quality assurance: The study showed that from 1960 to 1980, staff appointment and promotion processes were assured to range impressively between 75% and 84%. However by 1990, a drop to 63% had occurred, further dropping to an all-time low of 43% in 2010 (Figure 4).

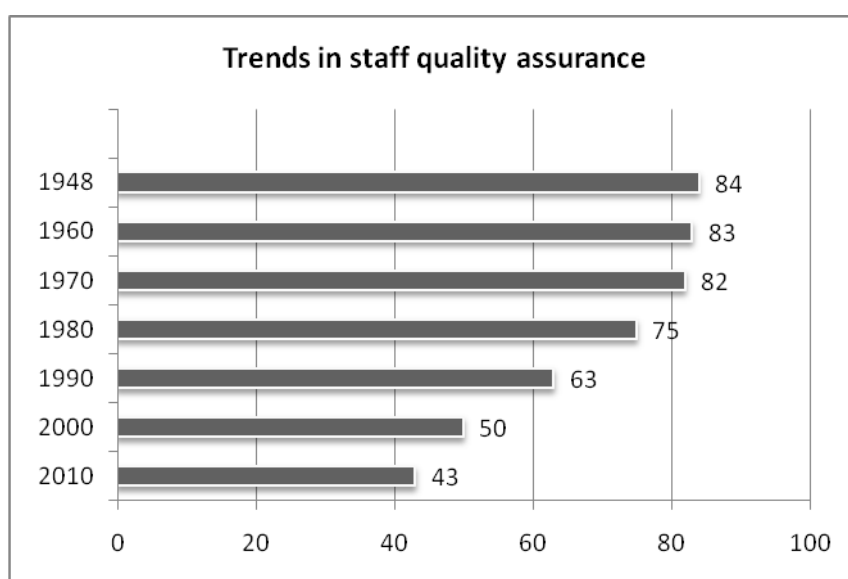


Fig 4: Trends in staff quality assurance

The study sample reasoned that the expansion of the system especially with state and private universities is accountable for the depreciation in the quality of staff appointment and promotion. Field observations confirmed that new universities depressed their appointment and promotion standards to be able to meet NUC-prescribed minimum standards for staff mix. More worrisome is the appointment into professorial positions of persons with academic credentials much lower than what obtained "in the good old days". A crop of professors had started to emerge within the last ten years that would hardly merit a lecturer grade 1 position in any of the first generation universities in the 1960s and 1970s. The claim to research and publications by these charlatan "professors" is found in

“roadside” journals and self-published, poorly-edited, largely-plagiarised books.

Clannishness and parochialism have also added dead weights to lowering the quality of process of appointment and promotion. In some universities including federal-owned institutions, being a “son of the soil” ranks higher than merit in appointment to management and academic leadership positions such as vice-chancellor, registrar, dean of faculty or head of department. State universities are most guilty on this score. Non-indigeneship of a state is inhibitory to appointment into the university, more so into academic leadership positions. A few universities such as Osun State University, Osogbo (UNIOSUN) and University of Science and Technology, Ifaki-Ekiti (USTI), provide examples of cosmopolitan and merit-driven climate for appointment and promotion. These examples are worthy of emulation.

Trends in quality of external examiner system: The results of the study (Fig. 5) showed that the external examiner system was strong and respectable from 1960 to 1990. From 1990 to date, a significant drop in quality rating was recorded to a low of 40% in 2010.

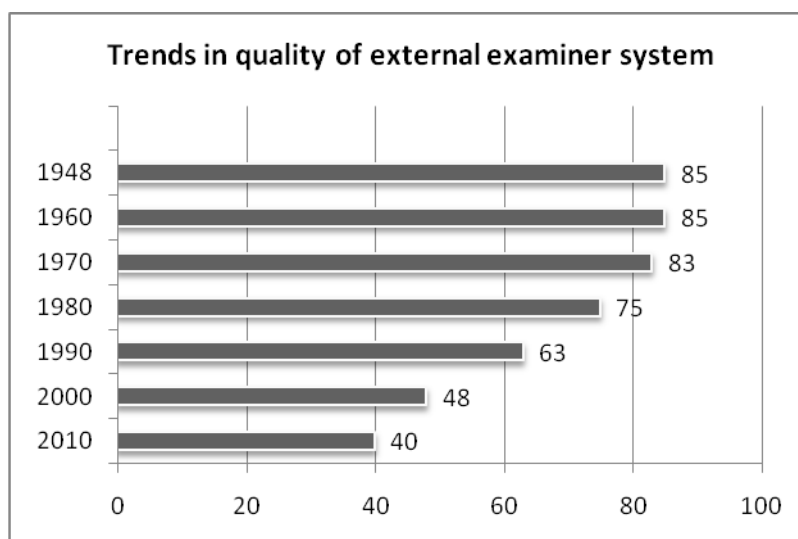


Fig. 5: Trends in quality of external examiner system

In the early days of the Nigerian university system (1960-70), the external examiner was typically a top-rate scholar from a highly-reputable university outside Nigeria. Many were from European and North American universities who were the household names in their disciplines. They vetted examination questions, moderated marked scripts and sat in judgement over the defence of projects, dissertations and theses. They applied the strict and stringent conditions for curriculum delivery and evaluation that prevailed in their institutions. This translated into adoption of the same culture of quality by the Nigerian university of the top-rate university where the external examiner came from. In contrast, the external examiner in contemporary times, is not cut in the same mold. Many are friends of the head of department who are invited not to rock the boat but paper over quality cracks in the curriculum delivery and evaluation processes. The good external examiner who stands the chance of being invited again (and make some little money on the side), is one who makes positive recommendations on a poor quality process. The “wicked” examiner who will hardly be invited a second time is one who applies the quality rule book and penalises as appropriate. With the ever-growing number of professors appointed or promoted on doubtful research and publication output, the ranks of the mediocre external examiner, if not checked, may swell in the coming years and lead to severe compromise of quality.

Trends in the visitation process: The survey sample adjudged the visitation process in the Nigerian university system from when data was available (1980) to be of good quality (mean of 75%)- see Figure 6. A visitation is often empanelled every five years by the Visitor of a federal university. In other universities, the regularity is indeterminate, oftentimes determined when a university-wide problem demands investigation and resolution by the Visitor or Proprietor.

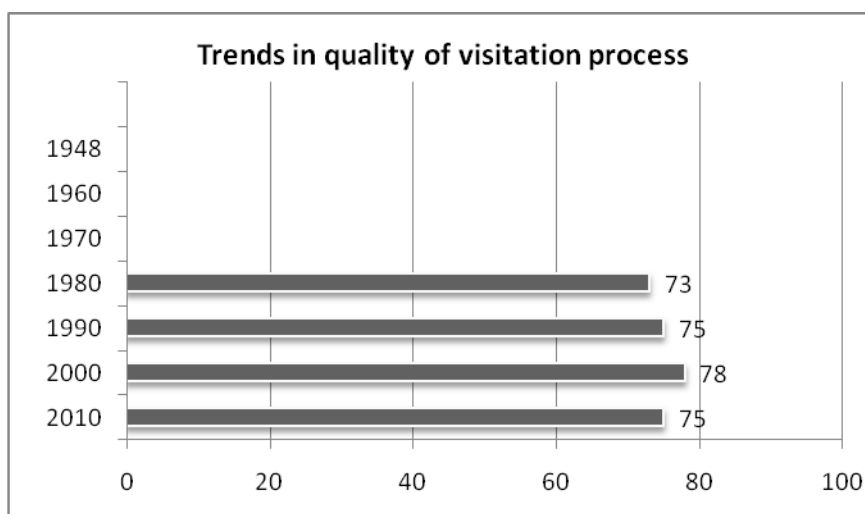


Fig. 6: Trends in the quality of the visitation process

According to most university laws:

The Visitor shall, as often as the circumstances may require, not being less than once in every five years, undertake a visitation to the University or direct that such a visitation be conducted by a selected team of academics, University administrators and/or professionals set up by the Visitor for the purpose of ascertaining that the objectives of the University are being met, and to this end:

1. conduct an evaluation of the vision and mission of the University;
2. ensure that the academic standards envisaged are sustained; and
3. enquire whether the administrative and financial affairs of the University are being conducted in accordance with the provisions of these Law, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations and in consonance with acceptable ethical and professional standards.

The findings of the study confirm the good quality of the visitation process over the years. However, it is worthy of remark that except in a few instances, the white paper that will activate remedial action is hardly published until after several years. This brings to mock the effectiveness of the process.

Trends in quality of the accreditation process: Accreditation as a process is a relatively recent phenomenon in Nigeria. This is perhaps a consequence of its recency in the global higher education transaction. Thirty years after independence was when the plan to implement programme accreditation came into being. Within about 20 years of its implementation, the study sample adjudged the process to be of respectable quality (73% by 2010)- Figure 7.

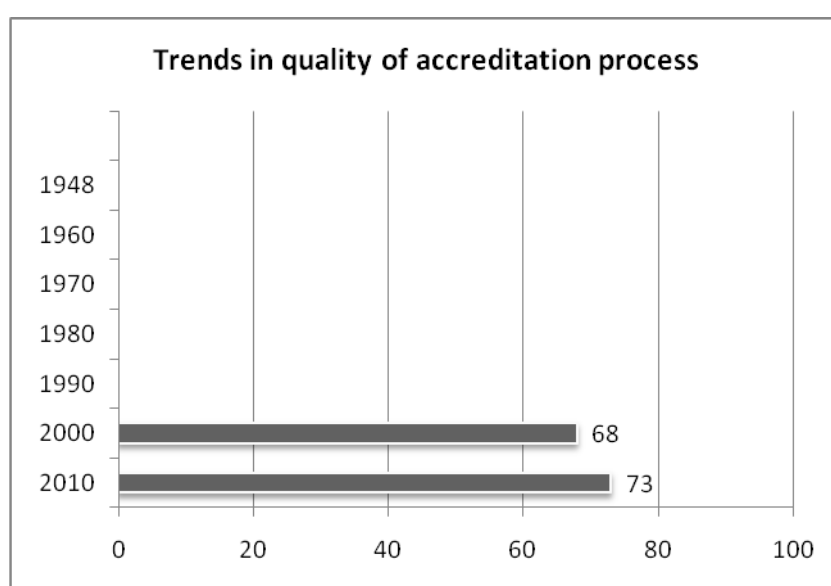


Fig 7: Trends in quality of accreditation process

Since its take-off in 1990, the accreditation process has continued to undergo refinement in the quest to improve based on lessons learned from one year to the next. The programme accreditation focus is expected to be enriched with institutional accreditation beginning from 2010/2011.

Current thrust of NUC towards institutional accreditation (pilot phase)

The National Universities Commission under the leadership of Professor Julius Okojie is expanding its quality assurance horizon to include institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation is a

process where an institution is reviewed by a competent body or organisation for the purpose of establishing whether or not the institution meets a particular set of standards. Institutional accreditation considers the characteristics of the institution as a whole. It evaluates the organisational capacity to deliver quality programmes. It does not seek to deal with any particular programme in detail although programmes are reviewed as a part of the consideration of the entire institution (Figure 8). It examines such institutional characteristics as governance, administrative strength, academic policies and procedures, quality of faculty, physical facilities and financial stability. It is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review.

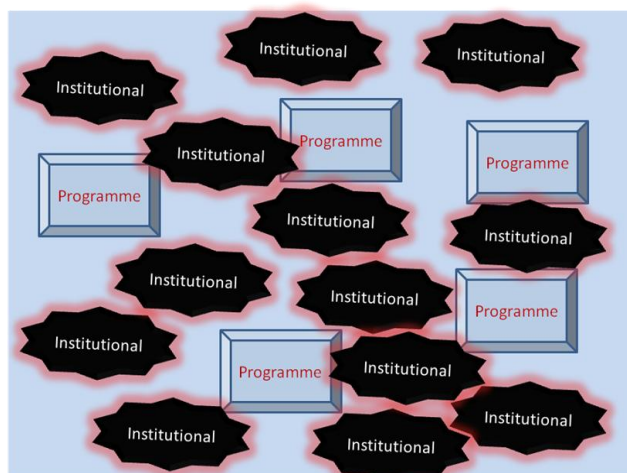


Fig. 8: Programme accreditation relative to institutional accreditation

Minimum standards have been developed around the following:

1. Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals
2. Institutional governance and administration
3. Institutional resources including Learning resources and student support
4. Quality of teaching and research
5. Management of human and material resources and institutional efficiency and effectiveness
6. Extension, relationships with internal and external constituencies and consultancy

7. Financial management and stability
8. General ethos

What to assess in the standards and some data sources are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Standards and data sources

	Standards	Data sources
1	Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals	
	Assess the fitness of purpose of the vision, mission and strategic goals of the university in relation to institutional responsiveness to local, national and international development agenda. Assess how overall university curriculum meets labour market, knowledge or other socio-cultural needs.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report University's Strategic Plan; Annual reports; Visitation Panel reports; Faculty and Departmental Handbook
2	Institutional Governance and Administration	
	In relation to vision, mission and strategic goals of the university, assess quality of governance and administration by Council, Senate, Principal Officers (Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar, University Librarian), Faculty Boards, Departments, and other statutory bodies. Assess effectiveness of the Committee System.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report University's Strategic Plan; Annual reports; Visitation Panel reports; Questionnaire administration and interview of staff, students, parents and other stakeholders
3	Institutional Resources including Learning resources and student support	
	Assess academic infrastructure and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, workshops, library, and staff offices); facilities for sports, games and recreation; healthcare facilities; regularity of water and electricity supply; network of roads; communication (intercom) facilities; toilet facilities; cleanliness of environment (not bushy, walls not defaced with posters); IT infrastructure; student hostels; guidance and counselling services and student support services	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; on-site assessment in relation to minimum standards
4	Quality of Teaching and Research	
	Assess general teaching and learning	Completed and

	interactions (curriculum delivery) in the university in relation to producing national relevant and globally-competitive graduates;; quality and relevance of research undertaken by staff and students; level of deployment of e-learning and use of new technologies for teaching, learning and research; research ethics, code of conduct, regulations on plagiarism and intellectual property rights;	validated Self-Study Report; on-site assessment of teaching and learning; University's Annual Reports; staff CVs; University Policy on research and its implementation; questionnaire and interview data.
5	Management of Human and Material Resources and Institutional Efficiency and Effectiveness	
	Assess students' admission and selection process- compliance with NUC and JAMB guidelines on carrying capacity and quality of intake; ease of registration for courses, staff recruitment process and staff mix in line with NUC guidelines; staff welfare; effectiveness and efficiency of the committee system; internal and external efficiency of the system (progression, dropout and graduation rates); visibility and richness of web presence.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; admission records; on-site assessment; interview of students
6	Extension, Relationships with internal and external constituencies and Consultancy	
	Assess quality and quantity of external activities of staff of the university; consultancies and virility of linkages with national and international organisations and universities.	Completed and validated Self-Study Report; staff CVs; University's Annual reports; records of consultancies and academic and cultural linkages.
7	Financial Management and Stability	
	Assess transparency and accountability in funds management; external auditor's reports; funds generation capability	External Auditor's reports; Questionnaire and interview data on Bursary administration.
8	General Ethos	
	Assess staff and student discipline tone; level of non-manifestation of social vices (cultism; examination malpractice; sale of handouts	On-site assessment; questionnaire and interview data.

The assessment criteria for the minimum standards which are currently being pilot tested in six volunteer universities are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Assessment criteria for minimum standards for institutional accreditation

Standards	
1	<p>Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and realistic vision and mission statements and strategic goals. • Strategic goals have timeframes and are measurable. • Institutional vision, mission and strategic goals are being pursued in alignment with development agenda at the local (e.g. State Development Plans), national (e.g. Vision 20-2020) and international (e.g. Millennium Development Goals) levels. • University curriculum across Colleges/Faculties are designed to meet the demands of the labour market and entrepreneurship.
2	<p>Institutional Governance and Administration</p> <p>Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lays down sound policies for effective running of the university • Appoints good quality staff at all levels, following due process • Prudent and transparent in the management of university funds • Innovative in attracting funds for the university • Performs oversight functions of the activities of Management • Manages staff appellate issues not resolved by the Vice-Chancellor • Promotes and makes provisions for research in the University • Provides for the welfare of all persons employed by the University • Proactive in dealing with academic and managerial matters in the university <p>Vice-Chancellor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership in promoting academic programme development of the university as Chairman of Senate • Leadership in promoting physical development of the university • Financial prudence • Fairness in attending to staff disputes • Implementation of the Committee System • Maintenance of security of lives and property on Campus • Ability to listen and tolerate divergent views • Trustworthiness as head of the university • Proactive in dealing with academic and managerial matters in the university • Passionate about taking the University to great heights

Registrar

- Quality leadership of the secretariat of Senate
- Responsiveness to staff needs relating to the Registry
- Accurate record keeping in the registry, including staff and student records
- Creative in solving problems in the Registry
- Provides sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on administrative matters
- Applies modern methods in Registry operations
- Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the Registry

Bursar

- Provides sound financial advice to the Vice-Chancellor
- Applies modern methods in bursary operations
- Institutes effective financial control
- Effective in record keeping in the Bursary
- Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the Bursary
- Creative in solving problems in the Bursary
- Responsive to staff needs relating to the Bursary
- Keeps accurate records in the Bursary, including staff and student records

University Librarian

- Applies modern methods in library operations
- Provides good examples to be followed by subordinates in the Library
- Creative in solving problems in the Library
- Ensures stocking of the library with current and relevant holdings of books and journals
- Liaison with departments to ensure that their specific needs for books and journals are addressed
- Provides sound advice to the Vice-Chancellor on the running of the library
- Leadership in establishing and operating a library policy for the university
- Gives academic leadership through research and publications
- Effective in record keeping in the Library

Committee System

- At least (a) 3 committees of Council; (b) 5 committees of Senate; (c) 2 Faculty committees; and (d) 1 Departmental committee are in place.
- Committees hold statutory meetings when due.
- At least half of the recommendations of committees of statutory bodies and ad-hoc committees are expeditiously processed.

3 Institutional Resources including Teaching-Learning resources and student support

Global

- Each College/Faculty has a commodious, visibly impressive building.
- All Departments have ample space for staff offices, classrooms, laboratories, workshops and library in line with the minimum standards for programme(s) offered.
- There is a health centre with in-patient and out-patient facilities. Staffing includes full-time medical officer(s), pharmacists, technologists and nurses. The Pharmacy department is well stocked for the population of staff and students. Service in the health centre is professional and prompt.
- Academic buildings, on-campus hostels and staff quarters are supplied with at least 12 hours of electricity daily and 24-hour supply of water.
- Network of roads feeding main university buildings are tarred and well drained; communication (intercom) facilities are functional;
- All academic buildings and hostels have functioning and clean toilet facilities in appropriate ratios to users
- Clean campus environment (not bushy, walls not defaced with posters); aesthetically-appealing landscaping
- IT infrastructure in place and functioning. 24-hour Internet access for staff and students
- Clean and well-maintained on-campus student hostels with adequate bed space per student
- Availability of efficient guidance and counselling services and student support services including transportation
- Recreational facilities such as games and sports are well developed, in use and maintained
- At least 70% of the buildings have fire-fighting and safety facilities.
- At least 70% of buildings have facilities to accommodate students with special needs.

Specific

- Minimum standards for academic infrastructure are met for all programmes offered in the university.

4 Quality of Teaching and Research

Assess general teaching and learning interactions (curriculum delivery) in the university in relation to producing national relevant and globally-competitive graduates;; quality and relevance of research undertaken by staff and students; level of deployment of e-learning and use of new technologies for teaching, learning and research; research ethics, code

of conduct, regulations on plagiarism and intellectual property rights.

Quality of Teaching

- Class is participatory, non-threatening and eagerness to learn pervades the faces of students.
- Lectures are based on the latest developments in the discipline as obtained from the most recent literature.
- Course materials are of good quality regarding academic content and are made available to every student.
- Lecturers and students are prompt to class.
- Class size and organisation are conducive to effective teaching and learning.
- Voice of teacher projects well or is aided by a functioning public address system
- Laboratory/workshop practicals are hands-on and investigatory.
- There is evidence of ample prelab/workshop preparations.
- Safety rules are obeyed throughout the duration of the practical work.
- Good use of instructional aids especially new technologies.

Quality of Research

- Minimum of 70% of staff in the university have published at least two articles in reputable local journals in the last 12 calendar months.
- Minimum of 20% of staff in the university have published at least two articles in reputable international journals and registered patents and inventions that are indexed in global databases within the last 12 calendar months.
- Minimum of 10% of staff in the university have won at least N1 million research grant each within the last 12 calendar months.
- Minimum of 5% of staff in the university have won international academic prizes.
- At least 10% of the research output from the university is from collaborative/transdisciplinary research

5

Management of Human and Material Resources and Institutional Efficiency and Effectiveness

Assess students' admission and selection process- compliance with guidelines on carrying capacity and quality of intake; ease of registration for courses, staff recruitment process and staff mix in line with NUC guidelines; staff welfare; effectiveness and efficiency of the committee system; internal and external efficiency of the system (progression, dropout and graduation rates); visibility and richness of web presence.

- Admission process is conducted within acceptable timeframes and in season

- Quantity and quality of student intake match minimum standards for the courses to which admission is made
- Registration process is devoid of stress to students and executed in a timely manner
- All staff are recruited through due process and in the correct category mix
- Welfare of staff and students not below generally acceptable standards
- At least 95% of students progress to the next level of degree programme annually
- Not more than 1% of students drop out (internally or externally) from degree programmes
- At least 95% of a cohort of students graduate within the duration of their course of study
- Pervasive culture of recycle and reuse of material resources e.g. paper
- Pervasive culture of conservation of water and electricity
- Timeliness (sessional) in the release of results to students and sponsors

6 Extension, Relationships with internal and external constituencies and Consultancy

Assess quality and quantity of external activities of staff of the university; consultancies and virility of linkages with national and international organisations and universities.

- Minimum of 20% of staff engage annually in approved extension services to the community e.g. public lectures and consultancies
- Minimum of 1% of staff are engaged in approved membership of national and international boards
- Minimum of 1% of staff have patents, inventions and commercialised products

7 Financial Management and Stability

Assess transparency and accountability in funds management; external auditor's reports; funds generation capability

- Awareness of the university community of funds intake and disbursements by Management
- Cash advances are retired within timeframe specified in the University's Accounting Manual
- Minimum of 20% of total income is from internally-generated revenue
- Publication of the annual reports of the university on the university's web site and in print
- Auditors' reports published and widely circulated (web site and in print)

- University is financially solvent and stable; university is able to meet all financial obligations; accounts not in the red
- Annual reports published at year's end

8 General Ethos

Assess staff and student discipline tone; level of manifestation of social vices

- Discipline culture pervades staff and student life in the university (promptness to work/class; prompt attendance to request for goods and services; maintenance of serene atmosphere; courtesy in dealing with people; respect for queues; and religious/cultural tolerance and harmony)
- Non-manifestation of social vices e.g. examination malpractice and sale of handouts.

Decision

The following decisions can be reached from the scores obtained.

Score	Letter Grade	Judgement	Remarks
80% and above	A+	FULL accreditation (10-year life span)	Excellent
70-79%	A	FULL accreditation (10-year life span)	
65-69%	B+	FULL accreditation (8-year life span)	Good
60-64%	B	FULL accreditation (8-year life span)	
55-59%	C+	INTERIM Accreditation (5-year life span)	Fair
50-54%	C	INTERIM Accreditation (3-year life span)	
45-49%	D	Probation (for 2 years)	Poor
40-44%	E	Probation (for 1 year)	
Less than 40%	F	DENIED	Fail

Proposed Process

The following **14-step** process has been proposed:

Step	Activity	Remarks
1.	Application	University applies in writing to NUC and on approval, proceeds to make online application.
2.	Self-study	University completes NUC Institutional Accreditation Self-Study Form <u>online</u> and in hard copy.
3.	Pre-Accreditation Meeting	Each institution holds pre-accreditation meeting with NUC to get acquainted with the process and for review of Self-Study Form.
4.	Composition of Accreditation Panel	NUC composes Accreditation Panel and reviews same with target institution.
5.	Training of Accreditors	NUC trains Accreditation Panels to familiarise them with the process and streamline (harmonise) assessment.
6.	Pre-Site Visit	Accreditation Panel and NUC officials hold meeting with University Management and other stakeholders on logistical and other issues related to the successful conduct of the exercise.
7.	Site Visit	On-site assessment using approved criteria (above, modified and finalised with stakeholders) and cross-checking with Self-Study Forms.
8.	Post-site visit meeting with University	Accreditation Panel reviews findings with University Management and other officials.
9.	Submission of first draft of report by Accreditation Panel to NUC	Accreditation Panel submits draft report signed by the University to NUC.
10.	NUC reviews report with University	Meeting held on the report by NUC with VC of the University and other Principal Officers. University to submit its improvement plan.
11.	Processing of report through NUC Management, Board and HME	Due process and consultations on report and securing of approval.
12.	Disclosure of findings	Release of approved results.
13.	Remediation by the University and continuous improvement	University takes steps to improve on its areas of deficiency.
14.	Post-disclosure visit by NUC and monitoring of progress	NUC visits the university periodically to monitor improvement.

Impact of quality assurance on quality of the Nigerian university system

The stress put on the universities in terms of demand and the limited expansion in physical facilities and academic staff to cater for this demand has taken a great toll on the quality of programmes in the institutions. Employers of labour and the general public have expressed concern over the quality of graduates of Nigerian universities. The situation is glaringly evident when they are requested to take qualifying examinations. Hitherto, Nigerian certificates were offered automatic recognition abroad. Similarly, an increasing number of employers are forced to practically retrain newly recruited graduates to give them the skills that should have been acquired in the University.

This problem is further worsened by the exodus of academic staff from the universities, popularly referred to as “brain drain”. This has largely been as a result of the economic crisis of the mid-eighties to early nineties in the country made worse by the devaluation of the Naira as a result of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Another dimension to the problem in the 1990s and which is now threatening the very existence of the system is the perennial staff strikes with resultant frequent closures of the universities.

The state of university education in Nigeria can therefore be described as one of massive explosion in student enrolment; increasing number of prospective new entrants in the face of inadequate and obsolete infrastructure and equipment; poor library facilities, inadequate academic staff in number and quality; lack of relevance of academic programmes, low level of funding, cultism, examination malpractice and generally therefore low quality graduates as shown by many studies supported by the World Bank and the Needs Assessment Survey of the NUC in 2004. The world economy is however changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of wealth. This is driven by technology especially information technology and biotechnology. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. The quality of

this and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. These challenges and problems call for a re-think of the sub-sector in terms of what it should be and how it is expected to play its mandatory role in the society.

The quality of graduates from the Nigerian university system was assessed by NUC in 2004 through labour market surveys. Highlights of the results are given below.

Management and Social Science graduates

- Lack of analytical and ICT skills required in the work place.
- Lack of entrepreneurial and problem solving/decision making skills.
- Inadequate technical skills as exhibited by their inability to appropriately apply acquired knowledge to the work place.
- Inadequate practical skills due to lack of linkage with industry.
- Lack of professionalism and professional ethics.
- Poor quality teaching staff due to poor training and lack of professionalism.
- Poor creativity and critical thinking.
- Low communication and literary skills.

Suggestions to improve competencies of graduates: Arising from the identified deficiencies, the following were suggested measures for improving the competencies of graduates:

- Improvement in the teaching of English Language to improve literary and communication skills of graduates.
- University education should be geared towards addressing our unique problems and needs while responding to global trends.
- Reading culture in the universities should be revived by emphasising production of books and journals as against handouts.
- Student Industrial Work Scheme (SIWES) and entrepreneurial education be integrated into the curriculum.
- University curricula should be restructured to imbue students with practical and analytical skills.

- University curricula should incorporate professional ethics and technical components to closely link theory with the world of work.
- Attention should be paid to training of teachers on the content-material development and proper mode of delivery.

Sciences

- Very weak laboratory practicals and field exposure;
- Limited knowledge of statistics, particularly biometrics and field experimentation, hence weak analysis of data and the faulty drawing of inferences to make logical conclusions;
- Lecturers were not committed to their jobs, many of them carrying out external jobs and assignments to the detriment of their primary job;
- Curriculum not modern enough, lacking in the treatment of new concepts and practicals, hence the lecturers themselves were not up-to-date;
- Skills in literary and Oral Communication, Information Technology, Entrepreneurship, Analytical Competency, Problem-Solving/Decision-Making Capabilities, Subject-Specific Knowledge, Technical Capability, Critical Thinking, Self-Directed Learning, and Numeracy, were, overall, considered only *average*, but the magnitude of weaknesses varied with the specific attributes.
- The only attribute in which the graduates were rated *good* was in Interpersonal Skills.
- The seriousness of deficiency in the various skills is evident in the *poor* rating by a consistent 20% of the respondents.
- Of the organizations studied, on the average, only 20% recruited graduates in the last 5 years, ranging from a low of 9% in 2002 and 40% in 2003.

Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine

- The basic weaknesses being experienced in the declining quality of graduates, with particular reference to Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine graduates, are mainly traceable to

the inherited (“carry-over”) weaknesses of pre-university level; that is, the primary and secondary levels of education, about which the respondents overwhelmingly pronounced “falling standards”.

- A thoroughly compounding factor is the pervasive deterioration of Nigerian social values of truth, honesty and dedication, thus leading to the moral decadence that has affected the processes of examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and more recently the Nigerian Examinations Council (NECO); and the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations/admissions processes.
- There is a disturbing massive shift towards university education by “all comers” regardless of background preparation, to the detriment of Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, which have their definitively complementary roles in human-resource production for national development.
- The issue of curriculum is two – fold:
 - subject matter inclusivity on the one hand; and
 - the task of faithful delivery of the full contents as programmed and scheduled within sessions and in successive sessions; it is believed that, often-times, the latter is the problem.
- Apparent under-funding of the universities has, overtime, led to the deterioration of existing structures and the lack of additional structures to match the phenomenal rise in student populations. More than that, it has caused a decline in the quantity and quality of the wide array of teaching facilities that would normally enhance the practical aspects of training. The point was also made that managers of the universities can be more resourceful in the acquisition, control, use and maintenance of facilities.

Arts

- Poor communication skills – particularly writing skills;
- Cannot write a note-verbal, or letter very well. Need to learn style, format, language, voice/ tone of both formal and

informal letters. They are also deficient in: situational writing and speaking;

- They lack the style that goes with each occasion.
- Need training in personal appearance, comportment and civility.
- A high proportion lack confidence, discipline and reasonableness.
- A poor attitude to work (lateness, truancy), and a tendency toward fraudulence and the get-rich quick syndrome were highlighted.

Architecture

- Practical skills: it was noted that Architects working with the firm did not have sufficient practical knowledge of architecture;
- Limited knowledge in some critical allied fields especially structures. The Company explained that the knowledge of structures acquired in the university had no bearing with the realities in the field;
- There appeared to be a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and the practice of the profession. Industrial training (IT) was said to have not been properly supervised and that students have not been serious about the programme; and
- Lack of some basic IT skills, e.g. knowledge of the use of computers.

It is noteworthy that there are on-going efforts to salvage the university system. For instance, the level of funding for recurrent and capital expenditure has increased significantly especially in the last five years; a national digital library facility is being packaged to ensure availability of current books and journals for university students and staff; installation of e-learning protocols in pilot universities for ICT-enabled delivery; since 2004, a monthly special grant is made to every department in the federal university system for the purchase of consumable items for the conduct of practicals, field work and the administrative running of the department; a massive overhaul of the

curricula was undertaken in 2004 which sets new benchmarks and minimum academic standards, modernised the curriculum and made it more socially relevant with a slant on entrepreneurial education; the system of accreditation, monitoring and quality assurance has been invigorated; enforcement of carrying capacity quota; access is enhanced through the licensing of more private universities and a blueprint on cultism is being implemented. Together, these efforts are reported to be impacting positively on the system. However, the rate of improvement of the system which had suffered decades of neglect is perceived by many to be slow. There is an obvious need to catalyse the recovery process.

Clamping down on degree mills

Degree mills (sometimes referred to as diploma mills, bogus institutions or rogue providers) are broadly defined as entities which offer, for a fee, degrees, diplomas or certificates and which requires individuals to complete little or no education or coursework to obtain credentials. Some of these fake universities, of course, will invent fake courses, fake grades, fake transcripts, fake certificates, and in some instances, fake campuses and addresses. Degree mills harm the society since the fraudulent credentials issued to individuals who have no knowledge and skills to back up such credentials, threaten public safety, especially when fake degrees are offered in such vital areas as education, health, and engineering. They also undermine the value of legitimate higher education institutions. Within a broader definition, legitimate higher education institutions which indulge in producing very poor quality graduates with a focus on large number rather than quality of products are degree mills (Okebukola, 2008).

There are key features of degree mills that are obvious wherever mills set up services. Description of these features provides a foundation for challenging mills now and in the future and can, over time, lead to a single international definition of these operations.

We know that we are dealing with a degree mill when the operation is accurately described by some or all of the following. Any one of these descriptors should be cause for concern.

- Lack the legal authority to operate or offer degrees.
- Require little if any coursework or completion of assignments and far less work than legitimate colleges and universities.
- Require a much shorter period of time to obtain a credential than the generally accepted time-to-degree of legitimate institutions.
- Requires little if any attendance, either on-site or online.
- Allow the outright purchase of degrees or credentials or set fees that are very high as compared with the average fees charged by the various types of legitimate institutions.
- Publish false claims of external quality review (accreditation or quality assurance) or, if the claim is accurate, the external quality review body is a mill or dubious provider as well.
- Issue degrees that are not accepted for licensing or entry into graduate or professional programs in the mill's home country.
- Are unable to provide verifiable lists of faculty and their qualifications.
- List "faculty" whose advanced degrees were issued by degree mills.
- Plagiarise material from legitimate institutions for inclusion on mill Websites.
- Feature Websites with internet domain registration that is obscured by a privacy service rather than being publicly accessible.

The Nigerian higher education system is the most expansive in Africa. It looks back to a highly respected system, now sadly paled, among other quality-depressing factors, by activities of degree mills. Persons who want certificates at any cost and lack the basic entry requirements for admission into available spaces in approved institutions make up one of the pools from where degree mills draw their students. The other source is the left-over candidates after an admission season. In 2008, it is expected that about 80% of the over million candidates who sat for the Universities Matriculation Examination will fall into this category. Holders of degrees from these bogus institutions are decried by employers of labour in the private

and public sector for their poor knowledge and skills in the enterprise they claim to have tertiary-level education. Attainment of the Nigerian vision of being one of the top twenty economies by 2020 will be compromised by the injection of such poor quality graduates into the economy. Herein lie the distaste for and the *raison d'être* for government's clampdown on degree mills.

Four major institutional arrangements qualify as degree mills in the Nigerian context. These are unapproved satellite campuses of local and foreign universities; unapproved sub-degree institutions serving as affiliates of approved universities; unapproved courses run in universities; and online courses offered by rogue foreign providers. From 1995-2001 these "pollutants" produced annually, about 15% of total university "graduates" in Nigeria. Between 2001 and 2004, there was a sharp drop in output, followed by a slight rise between 2005 and 2006. By 2007, the activities of the National Universities Commission (NUC), induced a significant drop in the number of and enrolment in these institutions. Sustenance of the momentum of the NUC clamp-down is expected to reduce the activities of degree mills to non-significance.

There has been a flurry of activities in the past eleven years directed at clipping the wings of the degree mills. Seven of these are noteworthy. By 1999, a national policy was enacted by the National Council on Education. This highest policy-making body directed the closure of all local and foreign satellite campuses. Policy enactment turned out to be a good beginning point in ridding the higher education terrain of degree mills.

Second is enforcement and application of sanctions. It was not until 2001 that NUC gave effect to enforcement of the policy on closure. In a dramatic national raid, NUC, backed up by the force of the anti-riot wing of the Nigeria Police under orders of the Inspector-General, took steps to physically close the illegal campuses. Success rate was about 90% since some that initially terminated operations emerged to clandestinely run their courses. Between 2002 and 2005, there was a perceptible reduction in the number and vigour of the degree mills.

The third in the series of actions against degree mills is the establishment and enforcement of carrying capacity of approved programmes. Carrying capacity is the maximum number of students that available resources can support in the production of quality graduates. This ensured that universities do not over-enrol through illegal degree-mill operations and resulted in the mapping and documentation of approved programmes. Sanctions for over-shooting carrying capacity are de-certification of the programme by NUC and non-mobilisation of graduates from erring programmes for the compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. The NYSC certificate is a pre-requisite for employment and for post-graduate studies.

Fourthly is the partnership of NUC with the Department of State Services and the Nigeria Police Force in locating, arresting, and prosecuting operators of unapproved universities and satellite campuses. The fifth strategy is public disclosure in national electronic and print media of the names of illegal tertiary institutions as recently exemplified by advertisements and news bulletin placed by the Executive Secretary of NUC, Professor Julius Okojie. Potential students, parents and employers of labour have started to shun these institutions. With dwindling clientele, such institutions are expected to fade into oblivion.

Beginning from 2007 and as a major stride against degree mills, NUC directed all approved universities to make full disclosure of their programmes. The Commission followed up with resource verification leading to granting of formal approval where minimum academic standards for setting up programmes are met. These programmes will be published in the *Directory of Approved Programmes in the Nigerian University System*. Since online and cross-border programmes are yet to be backed up for recognition purposes by any national policy or law, the publication of the Directory as a seventh strategy will screen out degree mills from institutions that potential students would desire enrolment (Okebukola, 2008).

On May 5, 2008, NUC announced the closure of ten illegal universities. Later in the year, more fake universities were identified

and listed for closure. This effort thinned the ranks of the degree mills and signalled others in the ignoble league that NUC was close at their heels. In addition, the May 2008 mop-up accreditation of programmes and the November 2008 nationwide accreditation exercise was another edge to the NUC sword for clipping the wings of degree mills. In September 2010, NUC published an updated list of degree mills and is following up with actions to penalise proprietors.

In the last six years, the National Youth Service Corps Scheme into which university graduates are fed, has stepped up its regime of screening out products from bogus institutions and unapproved programmes. Together, these efforts have translated into an estimated 70% success rate in the war against degree mills. Degree mills thrive on fertile grounds provided by a mixture of desperate students and easy-profit seeking providers. We must make the terrain as inclement as possible for the duo. The increasing number of candidates who fail to secure university admission and who want university degrees at all cost makes such an assurance unrealistic. Hope is however rested on the conviction that NUC will sustain its clamp down on degree mills, indeed, with increasing vigour.

Impediments to quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system

Depressed funding; capacity deficit in governance and management; political interference, low carrying capacity of the university system and corruption are some of the major impediments to quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education system. The contribution of poor funding to lowered quality is huge. The scenario that emerged especially between 1990 and 2000 is gross inadequacy of proprietor funding which pushed university managers to over-enrol poor quality students into satellite campuses and remedial programmes, primarily to earn income from tuition. Poor funding also explains infrastructural deficiencies and the engagement of university management in unwholesome income-generating activities. Occurrence of social vices such as examination malpractice and sorting as well as incessant

strikes and closures may not be unconnected, directly or indirectly, with poor funding.

Capacity deficit in university governance and management impedes the quality assurance process through inability of management staff to respond in a timely manner to the demands of quality. Vice-Chancellors, deans of faculties and heads of departments who project weak disposition towards applying strict rules to governance in the pursuit of quality are increasing in number especially in the state and private university communities. They bow to political pressure to admit weak candidates and be soft on disciplining students of influential members of the society or their staff relations. They succumb to compromising quality as payback to godfathers who were instrumental in their appointment. Such university managers were usually appointed on a “man-know-man” basis and hence lack the capacity to run a quality system. Some, such as dean of faculty or head of department got to positions on the basis of ethnic affiliation or religious disposition rather than through merit. Hence you find a “son of the soil” lecturer grade II with low management capacity but with high local connection superintending over a department with senior colleagues including professors who are not indigenes.

Political interference stands as obstacle to the quality assurance process in the appointment of weak but politically well-connected vice-chancellors and council. Pressure is brought to bear on the vice-chancellor to obstruct the course of discipline and warp student admission and staff recruitment processes. Council of some universities is laden with political office holders who lack understanding of the university system. Oftentimes, the mission of the university managers on quality diverges from that of such council members whose desire is to corner contracts and derive financial gains.

The low carrying capacity of the Nigerian university system poses a huge challenge to quality assurance. The deluge of secondary school leavers angling for the severely limited places in the universities brings with it a host of quality challenges. The capacity of 200,000 for new entrants into the 104 universities is a drop in the ocean for over

one million aspiring candidates. Examination malpractice and admission racketeering show up as collateral damages. Those who manage to secure places will desire to keep such admissions. The weak students resort to “sorting” to progress their way through to graduation. Also, low carrying capacity is one of the causative factors for degree mills which pollute the quality environment of the Nigerian university system as detailed in the preceding section of this paper.

Corruption displayed by staff, students, parents and others that patronise the Nigerian university system affects quality. The quality process is compromised through corrupt practices in different shades and forms. Admission, discipline, and examination processes are most affected.

After highlighting the challenges to quality assurance since independence, we turn next to the future of quality assurance in the Nigerian higher education (university) system.

The future of quality assurance in Nigerian higher education system

The ingredients for success for improved assurance are building up (Okebukola, 2002; 2008; 2010). The regulatory agencies- NUC, NBTE and NCCE are strengthening their capacity to deliver more effectively on their mandates. The Federal Ministry of Education, through its Education Roadmap to 2020 is re-positioning quality assurance and academic standards in a way that better quality graduates will be produced in the coming years. A generous political will pervades the air.

Whether or not on-going efforts will be sustained in the years ahead is a matter for debate. We however look to the future with hope trusting on the legendary Nigerian survival spirit. This trust should be backed up with appointment of Education Ministers and heads of NUC, NBTE and NCCE and their Boards who share the vision of improved quality for the system and are vigorous in the pursuit of such vision.

In the coming years, the challenges to quality will continue to be on the horizon. The pressure for admission will increase with its attendant quality challenges. The number of higher education institutions will increase to address the carrying capacity deficit. Staff for such new institutions especially the universities will be in short supply and quality of curriculum delivery will tend to decline.

The following suggestions are made to ensure that quality assurance of the Nigerian higher education system is set at a respectably high level in the next fifty years:

Establish a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System: There current exist, pockets of quality assurance agencies with no operational link between any two for the purpose of harmonising minimum standards appropriate for each level of the 6-3-3-4 system. Such linkages are important since the quality of basic education products is important for the senior secondary level. In turn, the quality of senior secondary products has implication for entrants into the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The acerbic comments and complaints about quality of products from secondary schools by higher education practitioners will be diminished if there is a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System that can synchronise minimum standards across the system. The elements making up the system will be the Inspectorate Service at the State and Federal levels, NUC, NBTE, and NCCE. The statutory quality assurance functions of the different agencies will not be thinned down by this arrangement. The strength of the arrangement will be in the component elements learning from one another and collaborating in monitoring, system-wide, rather than in individual cocoons of their sub-sector. When the Director of Inspectorate in Kaduna State is an observer in the NUC accreditation exercise of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria or NCCE accreditation of programmes at the Federal College of Education, Zaria, he/she will better appreciate the quality demand for higher education from the secondary school system. Reciprocally, NUC, NBTE and NCCE officials, by this arrangement, should participate in secondary school inspection on a random selection basis. From this team, the Ministry of Education will receive facts-based advice from the higher

education sub-sector on how best to prepare students for post-secondary experience (Okebukola, 2008b).

Subscription to international quality standards: In a globalised world, dependence on national quality assurance is best complemented with international certification of quality. Our higher education institutions should strive to subject themselves to national and international quality stamps. For example, our universities should earn NUC accreditation as well as accreditation by international agencies accrediting professions and institutions. This way, quality will be seen beyond local standards and graduates of such Nigerian institution with international accreditation will have enhanced mobility in the international labour market.

Improved resourcing of NUC, NBTE and NCCE: Human and financial resource strengthening of the regulatory agencies will foster greater readiness to face future challenges to quality assurance. Capacity building through local and overseas training of all professional staff of the three agencies should be accorded priority attention. Models such as the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) of the US and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the UK could be basis for such capacity building to approximate. Funds for effective implementation of the quality assurance programmes of NUC, NBTE and NCCE should be well provided for by government.

Establishment of State Quality Assurance Agencies: State governments should model the example of Ondo State in setting up agencies that will take responsibility for quality assuring the educational system in the State. The national quality chain is as strong as its weakest link. If federal level efforts at maintaining quality are strong and the States do not rise to the challenge, the overall quality is compromised. The future of quality assurance will be brighter if efforts at the federal and state level converge in promoting good quality of the education system.

Effective use of ICT in quality assurance: The efficiency and impact of the quality assurance process will be significantly enhanced with increased use of technology. Quality assurance practitioners will need

to be continually updated about emerging technologies so that these can be deployed for data capture, processing and management of the quality assurance process.

Setting up of a quality observatory: The regulatory agencies need to work in harmony to set up an observatory to monitor trends in quality in the higher education system with a view to responding in a timely manner to quality breaches.

International partnerships and alliances to bolster quality assurance: We endorse the recommendations of Materu (2007) on the issue of international partnerships and alliances as follows:

- *Partnership with foreign institutions and QA agencies* with sound QA experience can help to supplement local capacity in the short-term and also bring in relevant experience from other regions. However, this must be weighed against the costs involved.
- *The need for technical assistance to develop quality standards is urgent, particularly as regards regulation of e-learning and cross border delivery of tertiary education.* Because expertise in this area is very limited in Africa, external assistance may be required.
- *Regional collaboration in quality assurance is particularly relevant to Africa,* given the large number of small countries with fragile economies and weak higher education systems. Desirable forms of regional collaboration include peer reviewing for accreditation purposes, regional accreditation agency instead of national ones (especially for small countries), common standards and guidelines for cross-border education, mechanisms for credit transfer and recognition of qualifications, and sharing of experiences. But for regional collaboration to work well, increased commitment by governments and continued assistance from international development partners are critically necessary.

Conclusion

In this paper, we reviewed the trends in quality assurance in higher education in the Nigerian higher education system with special focus on the universities. In 50 years, the quality assurance process improved steadily. Improvement in quality of graduates from the system was found to mismatch the quality assurance efforts. This calls for invigoration of the quality assurance activities at the federal and

state levels. In this connection, recommendations were made for establishment of a National Quality Assurance and Monitoring System; subscription to international quality standards; improved resourcing of NUC, NBTE and NCCE; establishment of State Quality Assurance Agencies; effective use of ICT in quality assurance; and the setting up of a quality observatory for the higher education system.

As we celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the nation's independence, it is important to reflect on the importance of high-level human resources that the higher education system provides and the need to foster quality in the system. We must march resolutely forward on this road since this is one of the pathways to achieving our goal of being one of the 20 leading economies by 2020 (FME, 2009).

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About the Author

Professor Peter Okebukola was born in Ilesa on February 17, 1951. He had his higher education at the University of Ibadan where he obtained his Bachelor's degree in 1973 followed by Master's and Ph.D degrees in Science Education in the same university. He had specialised training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), and Harvard University, both in Cambridge, USA. and in TAFE, Australia. He now specialises in quality assurance in educational systems, educational evaluation, higher education and distance learning, science, computer and environmental education. He serves on a number of international organisations as Consultant including UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank, African Union and the UNDP. He is currently the Chairman of Governing Council of three universities - Crawford University, Osun State University and the University of Science and Technology, Ifaki-Ekiti. He is the President of the UNESCO Global University Network for Innovation GUNI-Africa. His research efforts have resulted in over 130 internationally published works and more than 150 national and international conference presentations. Many of his publications can be found in the world's top 10 higher education, science education, computer education and environmental education journals. He is the immediate past Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission. He has been awarded a number of honorary D.Sc degrees. He is the recipient of the National Honour of the *Officer of the Order of the Federal Republic*.

APPENDIX

List of Approved Universities in Nigeria

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S/N	Federal Universities	Year
1	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	1948
2	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	1960
3	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	1962
4	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	1962
5	University of Lagos, Lagos	1962
6	University of Benin, Benin City	1970
7	Bayero University, Kano	1975
8	University of Calabar, Calabar	1975
9	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	1975
10	University of Jos, Jos	1975
11	University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri	1975
12	Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto	1975
13	University of Port-Harcourt, Port-Harcourt	1975
14	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	1980
15	Federal University of Technology, Akure	1981
16	Federal University of Technology, Yola	1981
17	Federal University of Technology, Minna	1982
18	Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna	1985
19	University of Abuja, Abuja	1988
20	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	1988
21	University of Agriculture, Makurdi	1988
22	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	1988
23	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	1992
24	University of Uyo, Uyo	1991
25	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	1992
26	National Open University, Abuja	2002
27	Fed. Univ. of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	2007

S/N	State Universities	Year
1	Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port-Harcourt	1979
2	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	1980
3	Abia State University, Uturu	1981
4	Enugu State University of Science & Tech, Enugu	1982
5	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	1982

S/N	State Universities	Year
6	Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos	1983
7	University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	1982
8	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso	1990
9	Evan Enwerem University, Owerri	1992
10	Benue State University, Makurdi	1992
11	Delta State University, Abraka	1992
12	Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko	1999
13	Kogi State University, Anyigba	1999
14	Niger-Delta University, Yenagoa	2000
15	Anambra State University of Science & Technology	2000
16	Kano State University of Technology, Wudil	2000
17	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	2000
18	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	2002
19	Adamawa State University, Mubi	2002
20	Gombe State University, Gombe	2004
21	Kaduna State University, Kaduna	2004
22	Cross River University of Technology, Calabar	2004
23	Plateau State University, Bokkos	2005
24	Akwa Ibom State University of Technology	2005
25	Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State	2005
26	Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun	2005
27	Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina	2006
28	Bukar Abba Ibrahim University, Damaturu Yobe State	2006
29	Kebbi State University of Science and Technology, Aliero	2006
30	Osun State University, Osogbo	2006
31	Taraba State University, Jalingo	2008
32	Kwara State University, Ilorin	2009
33	Sokoto State University, Sokoto	2009
34	Ekiti State University of Science and Technology, Ifaki	2009

S/N	Private Universities	Year
1	Babcock University, Ilishan Remo	1999
2	Madonna University, Okija	1999
3	Igbinedion University, Okada	1999
4	Bowen University, Iwo	2001
5	Covenant University, Ota	2002
6	Pan-African University, Lagos	2002
7	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002
8	ABTI-American University, Yola	2003
9	Redeemers University, Mowe, Ogun State	2005

S/N	Private Universities	Year
10	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	2005
11	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	2005
12	Caritas University, Amorji-Nke, Enugu	2005
13	CETEP City University, Lagos	2005
14	Bingham University, Auta Balefi, Karu, Nasarawa State	2005
15	Katsina University, Katsina	2005
16	Renaissance University, Enugu	2005
17	Bells University of Technology, Ota, Ogun State	2005
18	Lead City University of Ibadan, Oyo State	2005
19	Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State	2005
20	Wukari Jubilee University	2005
21	Crescent University, Abeokuta	2005
22	Novena University, Ogume, Delta State	2005
23	University of Mkar	2005
24	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji Osun State	2006
25	Caleb University, Lagos	2007
26	Fountain University, Oshogbo	2007
27	Obong University, Obong Ntak	2007
28	Salem University, Lokoja	2007
29	Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State	2007
30	Veritas University, Abuja	2007
31	Wesley Univ. of Science & Tech., Ondo	2007
32	Western Delta Univ., Oghara, Delta State	2007
33	The Achievers University, Owo	2007
34	African Univ. of Science & Tech., Abuja	2007
35	Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	2009
36	Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike, Enugu State	2009
37	Nigerian Turkish Nile, University, Abuja	2009
38	Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu, Osun State	2009
39	Paul University, Awka, Anambra State	2009
40	Rhema University, Obeama-Asa, Rivers State	2009
41	Wellspring University, Evbuobanosa, Edo State	2009

List of Illegal Degree Awarding Institutions (Degree Mills) Operating in Nigeria*

- 1) Christians of Charity American University of Sci. & Tech, Nkpor, Anambra State or any of its other campuses
- 2) University of Industry, Yaba, Lagos or any of its other campuses
- 3) University of Applied Sciences & Management, Port Novo, Republic of Benin or any of its other campuses in Nigerian
- 4) Blacksmith University, Awka or any of its other campuses
- 5) Volta University College, Ho, Volta Region, Ghana or any of its other campuses in Nigeria
- 6) Royal University Izhia, P.O. Box 800, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State or any of its other campuses
- 7) Atlanta University, Ayingba, Kogi State or any of its other campuses
- 8) Sunday Adokpela University, Otada Adoka, Otukpo, Benue State or any of its other campuses.
- 9) United Christian University, Macotis Campus, Imo State or any of its other campuses.
- 10) United Nigeria University College, Okija, Anambra State or any of its other campuses.
- 11) Samuel Ahmadu University, Makurdi, Benue State or any of its other campuses.
- 12) UNESCO University, Ndoni, Rivers State or any of its other campuses.
- 13) Saint Augustines University of Technology, Jos, Plateau State or any of its other campuses
- 14) The International University, Missouri, USA, Kano and Lagos Study Centres, or any of its campuses in Nigeria
- 15) Collumbus University, UK operating anywhere in Nigeria
- 16) Tiu International University, UK operating anywhere in Nigeria
- 17) Pebbles University, UK operating anywhere in Nigeria`
- 18) Aston University, UK operating anywhere in Nigeria
- 19) London External Studies UK operating anywhere in Nigeria.
- 20) Pilgrims University operating anywhere in Nigeria.
- 21) Lobi Business School Makurdi, Benue State or any of its campuses in Nigeria.
- 22) West African Christian University operating anywhere in Nigeria.
- 23) Bolta University College Aba or any of its campuses in Nigeria.
- 24) JBC Seminary Inc. (Wukari Jubilee University) Kaduna Illegal Campus
- 25) Westlan University, Esie, Kwara State or any of its campuses in Nigeria.
- 26) St. Andrews University College, Abuja or any of its campuses in Nigeria.
- 27) EC-Council University, USA, Ikeja Lagos Study Centre.
- 28) Atlas University, Ikot_Udoso Uko, Uyo Akwa Ibom State or any of its campuses in Nigeria

- 29) Concept College/Universities (London) Ilorin or any of its campuses in Nigeria
- 30) Halifax Gateway University, Ikeja or any of its campuses in Nigeria
- 31) Kingdom of Christ University, Abuja or any of its campuses in Nigeria
- 32) Acada University, Akinlalu, Oyo State or any of its campuses in Nigeria.
- 33) Fifom University, Mbaise, Imo State or any of its campuses in Nigeria
- 34) Houdegbe North American University campuses in Nigeria.
- 35) Atlantic Intercontinental University, Okija, Anambra State
- 36) Open International University, Akure
- 37) Middle Belt University (North Central University), Otukpo
- 38) Leadway University, Ughelli, Delta State
- 39) Metro University, Dutse/Bwari, Abuja
- 40) Southend University, Ngwuro Egeru (Afam) Ndoki, Rivers State
- 41) Olympic University, Nsukka, Enugu State

In addition to the closure, the following Degree Mills are currently undergoing further investigations and/or ongoing court actions.

- 1) National University of Nigeria, Keffi, Nassarawa State
- 2) North Central University, Otukpo, Benue State
- 3) Christ Alive Christian Seminary and University, Enugu
- 4) Richmond Open University, Arochukwu, Abia State.
- 5) West Coast University, Umuahia.
- 6) Saint Clements University, Iyin Ekiti, Ekiti State
- 7) Volta University College, Aba, Abia State.
- 8) Illegal Satellite Campuses of Ambrose Alli University