

# **EDUCATIONAL POLICY FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**Property of AAHEA / IBEC,  
American Association for Higher Education  
International Business & Educational Consultants  
Dr. Stephen R. Barnhart, President [www.aahea.org](http://www.aahea.org)**



**Originally prepared for the Government of UGANDA and can be modified for use in Montserrat.**

## **PREAMBLE**

The development of a well-designed and quality Distance Education system based on the principles of open learning is the only feasible approach to meeting the needs of the vast number of the Bunyoro and Ugandan, people who were systematically deprived of educational opportunity in the past, while at the same time providing opportunities for the youth coming up through the educational system at present. It will allow people access to education and training and the ability to determine where, when, what and how they want to learn.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Pointing to limitations in the current provision of distance education, the text lists some of the criteria for its effective implementation: for distance education to function effectively, there are a number of criteria to be met, including the establishment of an umbrella organization, representing a liaison to the Ministry of Education & Sports for distance learning, an advisory committee with the task to act as a National Voice on distance learning matters, as well as support from the Uganda National Education Support Center.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all distance education establishments registered and accredited in Uganda by act of Parliament, observe the provisions contained in this document for quality distance education. That by act of Parliament all registered and accredited universities shall be duly described as meeting the required standards for quality education required by the National Council for Higher Education in Uganda.. That it further indicate that a set of quality standards for distance education methods in Uganda is used in the continuous task of building and assuring quality in distance education and training. This is reinforced by examination of international methods in assuring the quality of distance education provision. That Uganda is using quality standards for distance education, based on the following:

1. How distance education is different from conventional education
2. Why quality standards instead of norms and standards.

By way of a preamble, it will be also be necessary to explain the reason for the choice of format for quality standards as well as examining some possibilities for further development.

## **GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT**

The importance of a profound policy for distance education cannot be emphasized more as it is important that all Ugandan registered and accredited establishments shall recognize its purpose and observe the requirements and standards. The text recognizes that radical transformation is imperative: to meet the challenge of lifelong learning successfully, we need to recognize the delivery of education and training within an open learning framework.

A key challenge for higher education is to enhance the quality of higher education programs and to improve success and throughput rates. This challenge must be met in the context of greatly increased access to a wide variety of students at varying entry levels and within a higher education policy that increases significant slower than enrolments rise.

## **A QUALITY STANDARDS FRAMEWORK**

### **IN GENERAL**

The differences between distance and conventional education have formed an important part of many processes, including the ongoing review of the guidelines of the National Council of Higher Education Uganda. The key difference between distance education and conventional education is usually regarded as being in the delivery of the syllabus or educational content – in distance education, the syllabus is delivered through well-

designed materials rather than by a speaking teacher. This implies a separation of time and location between educator and student. Of course, although a significant proportion of communication between learners and educators is not face-to-face, but takes place through the use of different media as necessary, this does not mean that distance education involves no face-to-face contact. Importantly, though, face-to-face contact which does not involve simple transmission of knowledge from educator to learner; instead it involves various forms of learner support, for example tutorials, peer group discussion, or practical work.

Originally, it was assumed that replacement of some face-to-face contact with course materials was a “second-best” option to people marginalized from mainstream education for various reasons. Increasingly, however, the history of distance education practice has demonstrated that capital investment in well-designed courses and course materials, the costs of which are then spread over large numbers of students, is not only cost-effective but can lead to significant improvements in the quality of educational provision. Because of the necessity for published course materials and effective mechanisms to overcome the difficulties of greater degrees of separation of educators and learners, distance education places considerable demands on effective planning, management and administration of course design and development, student support and assessment. Well planned and managed distance education can be a cost effective way of ensuring access to education for larger numbers of diverse learners in more flexible programs than in possible through conventional education

Conversely, however, poorly planned and managed distance education wastes huge amounts of money. Furthermore, it does not ensure successful access to education and raining appropriate to the individual and fails to meet the economic needs of Uganda. Avoiding these types of pitfalls is essential in a country where the need to solve large-scale education problems in a context of dwindling funding is paramount. Clearly, distance education practices have an important role to play in transforming Uganda’s education and training system, a fact acknowledged in almost all recent developments and statements made. Given the above facts, however, there is clearly also a need for a set of quality standards to help educational providers put distance education methods to effective use and to avoid or reserve the dangers of poor planning and management.

This becomes more, not less, important as distance education and conventional education converge, a convergence created by use of new technologies, the notion of the “knowledge society”, the assessment of experiential learning and the development of distance education methods in conventional institutions. These is a recognition that education needs to be provided in much more flexible way – using resources-based learning methods and distance education methods in increasingly open approaches to educational provision. As such trends gather momentum, the experience that has informed successful distance education practice can be used to influence the quality of education as a whole. A distance education quality standards framework has an important role to play in making this experience easily accessible to more people.

## THE NEED FOR QUALITY STANDARDS

Initially, the brief of this process was to develop “norms and Standards for Distance Education”. From present knowledge and the input from stakeholders, however, some unease with the notion of providing “norms: was expressed. It was felt that “norms” tend to be interpreted in a narrow way and had authorization overtones of top-down management approaches. The general feeling was that this could stifle quality practice in the interests of regulating against very poor practice.

The argument to replace the term “norms and standards” with “quality standards” developed with reference to the following definitions in Shorter Oxford Dictionary:

*Norm:* a standard, a type; that is expected or regarded as normal; customary behavior.

*Standard:* A required or specified level of excellence, attainment. As an example of use, the Shorter Oxford includes the following: “Standards whereby to measure the relative value of different commodities”

In one sense, this report is describing customary, normal practice and therefore is setting out “norms”. But what the report would like to do is set standards on the basis of which there can be continuous quality improvement and not simply adherence to the minimum. This is antithetical to the notion of “norms”. Consequently, it is important that, because the primary goal is to build and assure quality, rather than simply to describe was expected or regarded as normal.

A further aspect to the definition of the word “standard” is the distinction between a standard as a “required” level of attainment or a “specified” level of attainment. If merely *specified*, standards serve as guidelines for good practice. If *required*, however, mechanisms have to be in place for monitoring and regulation. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that merely specifying standards to serve as guidelines for good practice, as isolated activity would lead to significant improvements in the quality of educational provision using distance education methods. For this reason, an outline of the various possible strategic initiatives to accompany the ensuing quality standards framework is given.

However, the quality standards have been written as descriptive not as regulatory. They focus on providing specific guidance for good practice and not on outlining a set of minimum requirements. This approach has been taken because, as was pointed out previously, distance education methods are increasingly being employed in a multitude of educational contexts globally and is also applicable to Uganda, where the needs are requirements are often very different. It soon becomes clear that such an environment, attempting to set universally applicable measurements for these quality standards is a futile exercise. Consequently, the approach has been to develop guidance for good practice and not a set of minimum requirements

## THE FORMAT OF THE DISTANCE EDUCATION QUALITY STANDARDS

The format chosen to express these standards has been borrowed from that used by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SOCTVEC). It is made up of a small set of general quality standards, each covering one of the important aspects to consider in distance education provision. Each of these general quality standards is then amplified in a list of various elements of the standard. They are as follows:

- Policy and planning
- Learners
- Program development
- Course design
- Course materials
- Learner support

- Learner assessment
- Human resources strategy
- Management and administration
- Collaboration between organizations
- Quality assurance
- Information and marketing
- Results

The reason for adopting this format is that readers need an overview of what constitutes quality distance education. These broad standards will remain relatively fixed for all the many kinds of distance education provision. However, the constituent elements may vary slightly. In development work with practitioners, one exercise would be to develop more context-specific elements of the general standard.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT, COURSE DESIGN AND COURSE MATERIALS

The list above distinguishes between “program development”, “course design”, and “course materials”, and this requires further explanation. Program development and course design both relate to curriculum, as defined in its most basic sense: “a course of study at a school, university, etc.; the subjects making up such a course” (Shorter Oxford Dictionary). They also relate to curriculum in its broader educational sense – concern with content, pedagogy and assessment as the basic elements of the curriculum.

- Program development concerns itself with the curriculum in macro planning of groups of courses, how they combine to utilize a general educational goal or set of outcomes (such as a degree, diploma, or certificate), as well as procedures governing access and articulation with other programs.
- Course design concerns itself with planning the content, pedagogy and assessment in individual course. The course is more than the materials. It is the structure of learning that is designed into those materials, and includes the range of learner support mechanisms and assessment strategies which are integrated with course materials in providing the course to the learner. Thus, course design involves looking at all of the elements of a course and ensuring that they are integrated in the most educationally appropriate and cost-effective ways.
- Course materials are the concrete products that are results of program development and course design activities. The way they are presented and used is determined by how they are structured into the overall design of the course.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENT WORK

It has been suggested above that development work with practitioners using the distance education quality standards framework might include developing more context-specific elements of general standards. Clearly, the standards as they are need adaptation, which could function as context-specific tests of the extent to which the standard have been attained. The best way to develop these indicators would be in the process of building and assuring the quality of a particular institution or program. Thus, continuing this type of work, and developing a range of tools to facilitate quality assurance processes, would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Higher Education and would increasingly be based on the specific needs of different contexts. It is for this reason that the tool provided here has been described as a “framework”; it simply provides the shell which will enable the Ministry of Education to continue this work, knowing, however, that they will be operating within a common framework.

The standard could also be recognized and rephrased in order to take more specific account of the needs of particular bodies or groups. These might include learners, educational providers using distance education methods, national and governments and the National Council of Higher Education and any associated structures. Learners, for example, should be able to use the standards to help them decide which course to take, or whether the report can be a tool they could use to evaluate themselves.

## QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

### POLICY AND PLANNING

Elements of the standard:

1. The mission statement of the organization sets out clearly and unambiguously the goals of the organization, the principles according to which it operates and areas of legitimate operation
2. Policy statements and strategic plans arising from the mission statement are appropriate for the national and local context and responsive to changing contexts.
3. Slogans and mottos reflect the institutional objectives and do not contradict policy and mission statements
4. There are policy statements on:
  - Program development;
  - Course design;
  - Course materials development
  - Services to and responsibilities of learners;
  - Learner support;
  - Assessment;
  - Language;
  - Human resource strategy;
  - Management and administration;
  - Finances and fees;
  - Quality assurance and review;
  - Marketing;
  - Accreditation (where appropriate); and

- Collaboration
- 5 There is a published statement of the institution's commitment to learners.
  - 6 Implementation/operational action plans are realistic and designed to enable targets to be met. Policy statements and methods of implementing them are recorded, readily available and fully understood by members of staff.
  - 7 There are monitoring procedures to ensure that all policies are implemented, evaluated and amended as and when necessary.
  - 8 Equal opportunities are ensured for all clients, learners and staff.

## LEARNERS

Elements of the standards:

- 1 The organization has information about learners under the following categories:
  - Demographic factors – for example, age, gender, language, geographic location and occupation;
  - Motivation for learning – for example, for career purposes or personal interest
  - Educational background/learning experiences – for example, prior learning and experience, prior qualifications, experience of distance learning, learning skills and styles and language background;
  - Special needs – for example, physical handicaps or learning difficulties;
  - Resource factors – for example, place of learning, times available for learning, access to electricity, medias and technologies and financial resources for purpose of additional materials; and
  - Success rates of past and present learners.
- 2 Research into their needs is a high priority in the organizations and is used to inform all aspects of policy
- 3 Learner information is used to design programs, courses, materials, learner support and counseling services that are flexible and learner-centered.
- 4 Supplementary materials and learner support are provided according to the needs of learners in relation to language and learning experience.
- 5 Tutors/lecturers have access to information about their learners and contribute to the collection of such information.
- 6 Systems exist to maintain the confidentiality of information about learners.
- 7 Physical handicap is considered in the design of course materials, assessment arrangements and communication with lecturing staff.
- 8 The organization is aware of and caters for learners with learning difficulties.

## PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Elements of the standard

- 1 The course is designed to include national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners, certification and registering authorities where applicable and employers in mind.
- 2 The number of courses offered by the institution is kept to a minimum to allow for the development of high quality courses in a cost-effective way.
- 3 The outcomes of the course are in line with demands of appropriate bodies, nationally and internationally.
- 4 The course is developed with the needs, knowledge and experience of the target learners in mind, as well as the required learning outcomes.
- 5 There is appropriate selection of content and assessment strategies to achieve the outcomes desired.
- 6 Methods of learner support are appropriate to the learners and built into the design of the course.
- 7 The choice of media and type of technology is integrated into the curriculum design and is justified in the light of the aims of the course, the required learning outcomes and learner needs and contexts.
- 8 A range of instructional methods is employed to help learners achieve the outcomes, catering for different learning styles and contexts and encouraging self-directed learning.
- 9 There is a range of assessment methods that provide for a range of contexts and that provide appropriate and comprehensive feedback to the learner.
- 10 The assessment strategy includes effective moderation procedures.
- 11 For each course, there is a publicly accessible description of the aims and learning outcomes, target group, style of learning and teaching, features of the learning environment and resources and pattern of assessment.
- 12 Entry level skills, knowledge and experience are made explicit for each course.
- 13 The institution makes relevant competence requirements of authors, consultants and others who are brought into the design and development process.
- 14 The institution gives authors, consultants and other involved in the course design and development process necessary guidance and training regarding aspects of distance education in order to assure quality in their work.
- 15 An appropriate infrastructure exists within the organization to administer the range of elements of the course efficiently.

## COURSE MATERIALS

Elements of the standard:

- 1 If existing course material is used for a particular course, its suitability is evaluated in terms of required learning outcomes and its appropriateness to the target learners.
- 2 If existing course material is used for a particular course, there is proper acknowledgement of the source of all quotations and no breach of local or international copyright laws.
- 3 The development of course material is based on a project plan which describes, for example, routines, finances and other resources, the delegation of responsibility among those involved and an adequate time schedule for the work.
- 4 The course development plan includes provision for evaluation during the developmental process in the form of critical commenting, developmental testing, or piloting.

- 5 There are mechanisms to allow for the periodic revision of the material in the light of feedback from learners and lecturing staff and advances in knowledge and research.
- 6 The course is developed with the needs, knowledge and experience of the target learners in mind, as well as the required learning outcomes.
- 7 There are clearly laid out objectives, content and indication of study time which allows learners to adopt sensible study plans.
- 8 The content of the course is sufficient, sequenced, relevant, accurate, relevant to core skills and outcomes and free of discrimination.
- 9 The learning and teaching approaches are appropriate, practical, varied, learner-centered, promote learner responsibility and cater for individual needs.
- 10 The various elements of the course materials and different media are integrated and the integration is clearly signposted.
- 11 The course materials are designed in an accessible way and use of language is appropriate for the learners.

## **LERNER SUPPORT**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.
- 2 Lecturing staff are selected and trained for their role of facilitating learning.
- 3 Sufficient contact sessions are arranged to enable learners to use the course materials effectively for learning (as a learning environment).
- 4 Lecturing staff are accessible to learners for individual tutoring/lecturing.
- 5 Lecturing staff are trained to teach on assignments by giving constructive feedback.
- 6 The turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum and specified to the learners so that they can use feedback to inform their learning on an ongoing basis.
- 7 Adequate administrative and professional support is provided to lecturers.
- 8 Lecturer performance is monitored regularly.
- 9 Feedback is sought from lecturers for review of courses and programs.
- 10 Administrative staff are trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners.
- 11 Learners have access to counseling before and during their course program as well as after its completion.
- 12 Satisfactory and cost-effective arrangements are made to meet learner's needs for physical facilities for study, lecturing and resource space.
- 13 There are functioning systems for follow-up and support of learners throughout the duration for their study.
- 14 Learners have access to the facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.
- 15 Learner structures such as student representative councils and faculty associations are recognized and learners are represented on structures of institutional governance.

## **LEARNER ASSESSMENT**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 Assessment is integral to every learning and teaching strategy adopted and includes formative as well as summative processes.
- 2 Where appropriate, assessment is a measurement of the achievement of outcomes.
- 3 A range of parties, besides the educator, is involved in assessment of learners: for example, there might be self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment by employers.
- 4 Assessment information (including learning outcomes and targets, as well as assessment procedures and dates) is provided when introducing new courses or modules or topics.
- 5 Progression within and between courses and modules is clearly explained and available.
- 6 There are systems of profiling and recording so that learners can receive detailed and accurate feedback on their progress or performance.
- 7 There is an appeals system.
- 8 The processes and results of assessment, where appropriate, fulfill the requirements of accreditation bodies and the National Council on Higher Education.
- 9 Where appropriate, the process and results of assessment are relevant to the needs of employers, community organizations and government departments.
- 10 Employers such as the private sector, government, non-government organizations and the community can find out easily what the learners have learned and what they can do on completion of a course or program.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 There are clear lines of accountability within the organization, between the organization and the National Council of Higher Education or Department of Education or Body/Board and vice versa between these Bodies and the community.
- 2 Staff and students are represented on governance structures where there is a need to form these structures.
- 3 There are effective systems for communication with current learners, with key outside bodies, with potential learners and with all staff and lecturing personnel involved in courses.
- 4 The appropriate mechanisms prevent staff from using position of power within the institution to generate extra revenue for personal benefit or double payment for the same work.
- 5 Customer enquiries, applications and complaints are dealt with quickly and clearly.
- 6 The enrolment practices include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners, as well as efficient handling of money and registration information.
- 7 The production and delivery of course materials is fast, accurate and reliable.
- 8 There are clear procedures to receive, record and turnaround assignments.
- 9 The turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum between two to three weeks.
- 10 Learner's questions are answered quickly (within one to five days), clearly and supportively.
- 11 Learner records are detailed, up-to-date and accessible to the lecturer.

- 12 Lecturer records are detailed for each lecturer and available to lecturer monitors.
- 13 The examination system, where it is necessary, is reliable and valid.
- 14 Records of course results can be analyzed to give completion rates for each group of the learners.
- 15 Premises and catering, (referring to staff and employees), facilities, equipment and materials are appropriate to the education and training services provided. Where campus learning applies, the same standard shall apply.
- 16 Equipment and facilities are well managed and maintained.
- 17 Staff (and, where appropriate, learners) are trained in the use of equipment, facilities and communication systems.
- 18 Financial procedures (for example, handling of course fees, orders, accounts, receipt of external funds and part-time and full-time salaries) are known and adhered to.
- 19 There are budgeting procedures in place to deal with the allocation of resources and monitoring of expenditure.
- 20 The budgeting procedures are flexible enough to promote and enable constructive experimentation in design and delivery methods.
- 21 Clear decision-making structures exist for seeking and receiving funds and the allocation and control of resources.
- 22 Appropriate financial aid is arranged for learners.
- 23 There is a system for reviewing the quality procedures used and ensuring that all changes are effectively communicated.

## **COLLABORATION BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 Wherever possible, arrangements are made between organizations for:
  - Sharing developed courses;
  - Jointly developing new courses;
  - Sharing facilities such as libraries and learning centers;
  - Sharing regional centers for learner registration, distribution of study material and examinations; and
  - Collaboration in the delivery of programs.
- 2 The membership of relevant associations and forums is encouraged
- 3 In the organization of consortia for course development or delivery, structured contractual relationships are formed to protect the interests of all parties including the learners.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 The management ensures that, in its day-to-day work, the organization's activities meet the quality standards set by the National Council for Higher Education as well as the organization's own policy for the different elements (as listed in point 4 under policy and planning)
- 2 There is an organizational culture that encourages efforts to improve the quality of the education.
- 3 There is a clear cycle of planning, development, documentation, reporting, action and review of policy and procedures within the organization.
- 4 Staff development is seen as fundamental to quality service provision.
- 5 There are clear routines and systems for quality assurance and staff are familiar with those that relate to their work.
- 6 Staff. Learners and other clients are involved in quality review.
- 7 Internal quality assurance processes are articulated with external processes.

## **INFORMATION AND MARKETING**

Elements of the standard:

- 1 There are sufficient systems and techniques in place for the accurate identification of market needs.
- 2 The publicity provided for each program is sufficiently detailed to enable applicants to make an informed choice. (The following is a suggested list of such information: target group(s), entry requirements, goals/objectives, content, learning material, teaching and learning activities, scope of program, assessment/accréditation procedures, price, payment conditions, right to return course materials [when applicable], withdrawal terms and conditions, time limits for completion, and terms and conditions regarding interruption/postponement).
- 3 Employers and other who enter into collective agreements regarding education or training have received sufficient and correct information about the content and outcomes, entry qualifications, implementation and goals of the program.
- 4 The organization's advertisements are truthful, objective and informative.
- 5 Information about programs reaches as many of those who can be expected to have a need for these programs as possible, given limitations imposed by resources and available information channels.

## **RESULTS**

This standard is intended to summarize the main results shown by a successful education provider. The quality standards for each of the elements of distance education will assist or, in some cases, are vital for the attainment of these results. In the end, however, an educational provider will be judged by the degree of success in the achievement of valid learning and teaching goals, the satisfaction of its clients, the self-improving ethos in the organization, cost-effective, and the type of impact on society.

Elements of the standard:

- 1 The mission and policy of the organization are in accordance with the principles and policy in the relevant national education and training acts or standards and the economic and educational needs of Uganda
- 2 The organization fulfils its mission.
- 3 The goals, entry level skills knowledge and experience, learning outcomes and content of the courses, course materials and programs are valid, relevant and up-to-date.
- 4 The programs, courses, course materials, counseling and support systems are informed by and meet the

- needs of the target learners.
- 5 The administrative systems are informed by and meet the needs of learners and staff involved in program or course or support design and delivery.
  - 6 Assessment is reliable and appropriate to learning goals and outcomes.
  - 7 Assessment results and or evaluation or monitoring mechanisms show that learners achieve the goals that are established for individual programs and courses.
  - 8 The organization has quality systems in place to ensure continuous self-improvement.
  - 9 Staff are all involved in a coordinated way in continuous improvement of the programs, courses, course materials, administration and support services.  
time, person-power and money for the design of the programs, courses and learner support systems.
  - 10 Sufficiently large numbers of learners complete the individual programs and courses successfully to justify The cost in time, person-power and money for the design of the programs, courses and learner support systems.
  - 11 The organization has financial results that afford the learners a reasonable prospect of completing their studies and sufficient profits to ensure the future development of products and services.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE QUALITY STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous part of the text, developing a set of standards which can be used as the starting point for improving and assuring the quality of educational provision using distance education methods are described. Consequently, in this part of the text, we will build on that work by suggesting various processes which, if initiated within the framework of the quality standards outlined above, we believe will facilitate the growth of quality distance education provision in Uganda. The first issue of importance in this regard relates to the establishment of the Ugandan National Qualifications Authority (LNQA), secondly it is recommended that an Advisory Committee for distance Education be established as detailed below and lastly, the establishment of the National Association of Distance Education Organizations Uganda (NADEOG) be considered to ensure Uganda is in line with trends and developments internationally. The purpose of LNQA as a sub-section within the Department of Education is to function on the same basis as the various NARIC's in Europe and similar organizations in the rest of the world and to register all the programs offered by Uganda registered establishment, whether it state or private organization. This will ensure greater recognition and control of the education system at large in Uganda.

### **KEY AREAS AND FUNCTIONS OF LNQA**

The functioning of LNQA shall be under the auspices of the National Council for Higher Education as a sub-division of the Department of Education. In terms of its establishment, this sub-division shall focus on the following:

1. Oversee the development of a National Qualification Framework based on similar systems and methods used in Europe, United States and the Commonwealth Countries.
2. Formulate and publish policies and criteria for: the registration and accreditation of organizations in education (including distance learning providers) and regulate the registration and accreditation in terms of the recommendations in this text including the conventional system to ensure uniformity in the Uganda education system.
3. Oversee the implementation of the National Qualification Framework including: regulation of national standards and qualifications.
4. Take steps to ensure that compliance of provisions of the standards for both the distance and conventional education system in Uganda is observed.
5. Step to ensure that standards and registered qualification with LNQA are internationally comparable
6. Advise the Minister of Education on matters affecting the registration of standards and qualifications
7. Be responsible for the control of the areas under its jurisdiction.

Another important area in education that will also regulate distance education is the establishment of the mechanisms for the implementation of quality assurance practices for LNQA in the following areas:

- To promote quality amongst constituent providers;
- To accredit providers in terms of the quality standards management;
- co-operate with the relevant organizations and associations recommended in the text;
- Utilize the services of duly qualified assessors;
- Maintain an acceptable database of relative information;
- Submit reports to the Minister;
- Recommend improvements as appropriate;
- Monitor provision; and
- Undertake quality systems audits.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE FUNCTIONING LNQA**

- In employing the framework, LNQA should focus on developmental, quality-building functions rather than using the quality standards as a set of punitive measures or as a gate-keeping mechanism.
- The quality standards for distance education should be used by LNQA as a framework for assessing the quality of education and training making use of distance education methods.
- Quality standards for distance education should ultimately be integrated into a broader framework covering the entire continuum of methods of educational provision – and this should allow users to construct their own quality standards framework based on the specific methods of provision being used by the educational provider or program concerned.
- The various sub-divisions within the Department of Education should be familiarized with the quality distance education standards framework, both to support their general work and to strengthen their relationship with various bodies as well as LNQA

- Where applicable, the Department of Education should appoint LNQA to oversee the implementation of professional development programs for officials to build their capacity to use the distance education quality standards framework efficiently in their work. Where the services of external providers are required, LNQA should ensure the training outcomes are met.
- The quality standards for distance education should be used by LNQA as a framework for assessing the quality of education and training making use of distance education methods.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS UGANDA (NADEOG)

The importance of establishing a National Association representing distance education organization providers in Uganda is important. The establishment of NADEOG will bring Uganda in line with global practice with regard to the representation and professional support of distance education. The Association is also responsible to make decision-makers, in both the public and private sectors, increasingly aware of the potential of distance education.

The over-arching aim of this Association is to provide a forum for Ugandan organizations who are committed to increasing access to an affordable, cost effective and quality learning environment in which learners are empowered to become self sufficient members of society. The following objectives for the Association are:

1. to facilitate collaboration among distance organizations and other organizations or interested in distance education in Uganda;
2. To advocate awareness, understanding and application of distance education and open learning amongst policy makers, practitioners and learners;
3. To promote research and evaluation on all aspects of distance education, open learning and related topics in Uganda;
4. To exert influence with regard to adequate policy (including financial support) for distance education;
5. To advance the professional interests of distance education practitioners;
6. To promote and enhance quality assurance in distance education;
7. To advise and inform to the Minister of Education on matters of distance education, but shall have no legal power to make or enforce rules, laws or policies;
8. Shall have official recognition from the Ugandan Government as a representative organization for distance education providers in Uganda;
9. Membership shall be open to any organization, other Ugandan education providers and any interested party concerned with quality education in Uganda.

The establishment of the Association shall be by means of the registration of a public institution under the Ugandan applicable law with its own constitution, an initiative undertaken by the various registered distance learning providers in Uganda. The governing of the Association shall be by a Committee elected from its member organizations as stipulated in its articles of association and bye-laws. All Ugandan registered distance learning providers are encouraged to seek to become members of this organization in support of regulation, control and management of distance learning education in Uganda.

The process of the establishment of the NADEOG shall be initiated by the University of Uganda, which acts as the Umbrella and overseer for the implementation and maintenance of the cooperation between the registered and accredited universities under the terms and conditions of the memorandums of understanding applicable to each university signed with the University of Uganda. Reports on the establishment and operation of NADEOG shall be made to the Minister of Education on a regular basis by the responsible University of Uganda official with the task of public relations to the government and Ugandan Community.

Although the Association shall function under its own articles of association and bye-laws, there shall be only two grades of membership recognized by the government of Uganda, as follows:

1. Associate – At this grade of membership, establishments whom have been registered in Uganda shall be those whom have complied with the requirements to operate in Uganda, but their status for accreditation is pending the final approval from the Minister of Education;
2. Member – At this grade of membership, establishments are duly registered and accredited in Uganda by act of Parliament with a permanent Charter enacted by the Government of Uganda

Member organizations will receive a membership certificate endorsed by the Council of Higher Education in Uganda as shall be able to describe their membership as acknowledged by the Ugandan Government.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON DISTANCE EDUCATION IN UGANDA

The establishment of an advisory committee in Uganda is very important to directly represent the distance learning education organizations at the highest formal level in government. This will ensure direct contact, consultation, exchange of information, addressing areas of importance in distance education and similar issues regarding the control and regulation of distance education in Uganda.

After the establishment of NADEOG, the Advisory Committee shall be formed and duly appointed with the approval from the Minister of Education. The Minister of Education reserves the right to expel or disapprove the appointment of any Committee member.

The advisory committee must be established by act of Parliament or by the promulgation of a decree issued by Parliament. The committee shall report its findings to the Parliament or the President of Uganda and shall only act in an advisory position on distance learning for government. The functioning and administration of the committee shall be determined by law as required.

An advisory Committee on distance education representing all parties suggested, shall be constituted as follows:

1. The Committee shall be chaired by the Minister of Education or his duly appointed deputy or appointed official representing the Ministry of Education;
2. A representative of the National Council of Higher Education;
3. A representative from Uganda National Qualifications Authority (LNQA) [reference to its establishment and recommendations to it functioning is described in the text.
4. Two officials from NADEOG elected by the member organizations within the Association;

5. A representative from the University of Uganda;
6. A representative from the Public Schools to be appointed by the President of Uganda or by the authority given to any other government official by the President;
7. A representative from the private sector to be appointed by the President of Uganda or by the authority given to any other government official by the President
8. An international representative from a recognized and accredited distance learning university to be appointed by the President of Uganda or by the authority given to any other government official by the President

## LEGISLATIVE CONSIDERATIONS FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Much can be said about the value of attempting to develop legislation for the distance education quality standards framework. However, it is pointless of setting universally applicable measures for these quality standards, means that it would not be possible to develop such legislation. It was also felt that legislation developed to enforce minimum standards would be likely to be unnecessarily perceptive, without contributing to building and ensuring quality in the use of distance education methods. This view is supported by findings of the scan of international approaches to assuring quality in distance education and has been integrated to the approach taken to developing the distance education quality standards framework.

Nevertheless, the reality remains that, in a country where educational levels are generally quite low, massive opportunities exist for exploiting students or the abuse of the system for financial or other gain. Consequently, some minimum legislation is required to lessen the possibilities of exploiting people's desire to upgrade their levels of education, but the recommendations made below are relevant for two reasons: first, because legislation specific to distance education provision, in the form of the existing act does not exist; and, second, because the physical separation of educational provider and learner heightens the possibilities of successfully operating exploitive educational practices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE CONTROL

- The amendment of the existing Education Act to be brought in line with the latest developments in the Ugandan education system.
- Parliament should empower the Minister of Education to approve a set of rules based on the recommendations in this text to allow the Minister to regulate all distance education providers not currently registered under the latest requirements, till the promulgation of the amended Education Act to incorporate the establishment and regulation of distance education in Uganda, and where applicable, he implementation of the recommendations as a result of this text. It has been suggested that the implementation of these standards should fall under the existing legislation as suggested above.
- A review of the existing legislation and scanning of planned legislation should be undertaken to ensure there is legal uniformity in terms of distance education provision and in terms of the treatment of private and public providers of education and training.

## OTHER DEPARTMENTAL PROCESSES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELATED TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

In addition to the initiatives proposed in the process of decision-making and management of the implementation of a regulated distance education system, focus on developing an enabling infrastructure which will support the development and use of distance learning methods are in brief as follows:

1. Encouraging new approaches to making decisions by:
  - Developing the decision-making framework tool further;
  - Running introductory workshops on the decision-making framework;
  - Researching and evaluating the tool.
2. Information networking projects:
  - Establishing a clearing-house of information;
  - Developing a technology-enhanced learning website
  - Conducting an audit of existing resources.
3. Course design and development for the following courses:
  - A technology-enhanced learning course for education in all sectors;
  - An instructional design course, covering course materials design and development for a range of media and technologies;
  - A generic information literacy course;
  - A course focusing on the professional development of community center managers;
  - A course introducing the Internet to first-time users.
4. Professional development of educators, educational managers and support staff (administrative and technical), focusing on the following:
  - Professional development of community center managers;
  - A technology-enhanced learning course;
  - An instructional design course;
  - An information literacy course
5. Promoting information literacy through the following activities:
  - Developing an information literacy course;
  - Developing an introduction to the Internet;
  - Creating a information technology national qualifications framework.
6. Encouraging research and evaluation by:
  - Conducting research and evaluation in all proposed initiatives'
  - Conducting a media and broadcasting plan.
7. Using technology to support transformation of the management and administration of education and training by running a monitored pilot project.
8. Contributing to the development of a network of community centers by:
  - Surveying existing community center initiatives;

- Establishing a macro coordinating function for the educational contributions to community centers;
- Running professional development for community center managers.

## CONCLUSION

An understanding of the potential of distances education methods, together with a grasp of quality standards for distance education provision will be valuable in the implementation of several of these recommended projects. For this reason, we believe that planning to take forward the work of the implementation of methods to enhance the learning system in Uganda should actively considered and must integrate the distance education quality standards framework wherever feasible and appropriate.

Submitted by: Stephen R. Barnhart, Ed.D, Ph.D



### United States Address:

12110 Grandview Road  
Grandview, MO 64030  
United States of America 64030  
Tel.: 816.765.7862