

# Regulating higher education

**N**ational Council for Higher Education (NCHE) launched their multi-billion offices. Owen Wagabaza talked to Prof. John Opuda Asibo about the transformation of the institution

## How do you view the role of NCHE?

At a time when higher education is being transformed from the monopoly of the elite to the right of the masses and when global forces are transforming the way higher education is being delivered, the role of a regulatory agency becomes crucial.

In 1986, for example, Uganda had only one university and 20 tertiary institutions, with an intake, which was obviously small. Currently, Uganda has nine public universities, 38 private universities and over 240 tertiary institutions, with most of them private.

The National Council for Higher Education was established by an Act of Parliament to regulate higher education, guide the establishment of institutions of higher learning and ensure that quality and relevant education is delivered.

NCHE is a semi-autonomous and self-accounting body with a secretariat headed by the executive director. The day-to-day operations of the secretariat are vested in the executive director, who reports to the National Council.

In the execution of the policies of the NCHE, the heads of departments, who constitute the management team, assist the executive director.

## What do you exactly do?

Our functions include promoting and developing the processing and dissemination of information on higher education for the benefit of the people. We also advise the line minister on the establishment and accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education.

We are mandated to receive, consider and process applications for the establishment and accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education. We also carry out the accreditation of the academic and professional programmes of those institutions, in consultation with professional associations and regulatory bodies.

We register all institutions of higher education established under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions



The newly constructed NCHE building

**WE ARE MANDATED TO ENSURE THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDE ADEQUATE FACILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING**

Act, 2001, as well as receiving and investigating complaints relating to institutions of higher education. It is also our mandate to monitor, evaluate and regulate institutions of higher learning.

In co-operation with the relevant government departments, private sector, or the different institutions of higher education, we evaluate the overall national manpower requirement and recommend solutions to the requirements.

We ensure minimum standards for courses of study and equating of degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded by the different public and private institutions of higher education. We also set and co-ordinate national standards for admission of students to the different institutions of higher education.

It is also our role to ensure that all universities, whether private or public, adhere to minimum criteria set by the national council for admission to under-graduate and higher

degree programmes. In addition, we determine the equivalence of all types of academic and professional qualifications of degrees, diplomas and certificates obtained elsewhere, with those awarded by Uganda's institutions of higher education for recognition in Uganda.

We also certify that an institution of higher education has adequate and accessible physical structures and staff for the courses to be offered. In that regard, we promote national interests in courses of study and professional qualifications among the institutions of higher education.

We are also mandated to ensure the institutions of higher education provide adequate facilities and opportunities for career guidance and counselling. NCHE collects, examines and publishes information relating to the different institutions of higher education.

Last but not least, NCHE



Prof. Opuda Asibo, the executive director of NCHE

is mandated to advise the Government on policy and other matters relating to institutions of higher education. We perform any other function incidental to the objects of the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001 or relating to higher education in Uganda or that which may be conferred upon it by the minister or any other law.

## What achievements have you registered over the years?

Our achievements include increasing public universities from one to nine and private universities from less than 10 to 38 universities and over 240 tertiary institutions.

We have also increased the enrolment of students in

institutions of higher learning to 6.8% from 3.8% and the number of students who join higher institutions of learning to 240,000 from 10,000 in 1986.

Even our staff has increased, from six employees to 40 staff members currently.

## What challenges have you encountered in the course of duty?

Our biggest challenge has been the attitude of Ugandans. We are poor at compliance. Ugandans don't believe that there are laws that should be followed. We instead do things contrary to the existing laws. As a result, we are spending more time trying to maintain order rather than making progress.

We also don't have

enough money to do our work effectively. There is need for financial support from the Government to the NCHE to make it an autonomous, independent regulator.

NCHE has a challenge of manpower. We need a workforce of about 100 people, but we have only 40%, this calls for an increase in the wage bill from the Government.

We also have a challenge with our sister institution, BTJET (Business, Technical and Vocational Education). NCHE has often times found itself clashing with BTJET on who should supervise what and this is not right.

There is also the challenge of dealing with politicians, especially during election time. What the public does not know is that it is NCHE that is mandated with

verifying academic papers of politicians. NCHE deals with higher education and not A'level, which is the minimum qualification.

As long as the minimum qualification for Member of Parliament is A'level, we don't have anything to do with it.

## How would you want to be helped?

We request for more financial support and increased manpower to do our work effectively. We also need support from everyone as this will enable us do our work well.

Ugandans should also have respect for the laws and this will enable NCHE to improve the quality of education rather than spending time doing corrective work.