

COUNCIL HAD BEEN ACCUSED OF LICENSING 'SHOPS' RATHER THAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

New institutions to pay sh100m for licences

By John Semakula

Anyone planning to start a private tertiary institution without evidence of having capital worth sh100m in the near future may have to look for another cheap business idea.

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) will soon require investors applying to start tertiary institutions to execute a security bond.

According to the proposal, investors will be required to pay a sh50m performance bond for a provisional licence allowing them to open their institutes, and the fee would come to sh100m upon classification (lifetime licence).

The requirement is contained in proposals NCHE has come up with, in what it says, is an effort to streamline the operations of Other Tertiary Institutions (OTIs).

Introducing the idea, Innocent Nkwasiibwe, the senior higher education officer and the head of OTIs, said: "The proposal is as controversial as it is necessary."

"The bond is a kind of contingency fund or caution money for cases where the institution closes and students are stranded."

He said the bond money will be useful in cases where the institution fails to comply with the terms of the licence and has to wind up.

"In that case, the National Council for Higher Education uses the money to provide students transcripts, certificates and to certify those documents and for other administrative expenses," he said.

It is not clear whether this proposal will only affect new institutes seeking licences or even others with provisional licences.

"A policy to that effect is being developed," Nkwasiibwe said.

The proposals, drafted by a technical working group, were discussed on Thursday by the stakeholders of OTIs during a validation session of Schedule 5, Regulation 15.

Schedule 5 lays out the requirements for applying and receiving a licence from NCHE to run a tertiary

COUNCIL BOSS DEFENDS PROPOSAL

■ The executive director of NCHE, Prof. Opuda-Asibo, said the new proposal is intended to sieve "who is not able to start an institution". He said whenever institutions close, the council faces a big challenge of how to handle the affected students, particularly their records. He said that was the case when Namasagali and Lugazi universities closed sometime back.

■ He said: Institutions must be responsible. You cannot get money from the public and just run away."

■ The bond is intended to mitigate such scenarios, he explained.



institution.

Prof. Lutalo Bbosa and Dr. Moses Twesigye-omwe led the working group. Schedule 5 also serves as a checklist of capacity indicators for OTIs.

Justifying the cause, Lutalo said: "Quality has been elusive against a massive expansion of the sector and the new capacity indicators were intended to address just that."

Closing the workshop, the deputy executive director of NCHE, the Rev. Can. Dr Alex Kagume, said: "This effort is not intended to torture but to nurture institutions to grow and not to be stunted. Our eyes are focused on the products (graduates) of these institutions; how will they turn out in life: As useful or failures?"

State minister for primary education Rosemary Seninde said she was not surprised by the proposal because of the demand to guarantee the quality of education in the country.

Seninde noted that even in primary and secondary schools, proprietors must show evidence that they can

manage schools before being licensed.

She said the recent operations that saw many schools closed in the country were intended to prevent investors without minimum financial requirements from entering the sector.

Hot debate on sh100m

But the idea on whether the sh100m bond should be endorsed and how the money will be used sparked a hot debate.

A participant told *New Vision* that some of them rejected the idea wondering whether the bond would not lock out potential investors who can't afford the amount.

There were also serious concerns on whether the sh100m would be redeemed at a certain point to go back to the institutions and where the money would be banked.

Some were also concerned that the NCHE would misappropriate their money. They also wanted to know who would benefit from the accruing interest.

Other proposals

Other important proposals included one on the size of land an investor who wants to start an institute should have.

The group proposed that the investors should have at least two acres in urban areas while in rural areas it should be five acres.

But a heated argument erupted over the requirement in an urban setting. Participants said the scarcity of land in urban areas had raised the cost sharply and that the demand was unrealistic. They also said the possibility of storeyed premises rendered the requirement null and void.

The technical team stood its ground and argued that urban areas are not confined to Kampala Road or other big towns, but stretch to town boards, town councils and municipalities where, they said, land is "still abundant".

"We want to decongest the urban areas of institutions and spread them out to locations conducive for

■ James Ssewanyana, one of the managers of Access School of Nursing and Midwifery in Nakaseke, told *New Vision* that the proposal would not only affect investors, but also parents and students.

■ "The list of requirements for one to start an institute is already very long," he said.

■ "We started this nursing institute in 2015, but we are only injecting into it money. We are required to buy equipment which even government institutes do not have."

■ Ssewanyana said whenever the Government extends the burden to proprietors in schools and institutes, they also push it to students by increasing the fees.

PARTNERS RESPOND

academic and practical skills training," Twesigye-omwe argued.

Reacting on the same issue, Nkwasiibwe said the council had in the past been accused of licensing shops rather than institutions of higher learning and that the new proposals were intended to "lock out jokers and spoilers".

"In Kampala, some institutes are housed in residential houses sitting on a 50x100 piece of land or even less. This prevents learners from exercising the bodies in sports," said an expert.

Toilet vs latrines

NCHE also proposed that institutions will not be allowed to have latrines but only flush toilets. They will also be required to have an intercom and not just mobile phones and a staffing ratio of 70% full-time lecturers against 30% part-time.

The session held at the global Distance Learning Centre/Conference Hall, Uganda Management Institute was co-chaired by Lutalo Bbosa and Twesigye-omwe.