

By Martin Kitubi

A row has erupted over who has autonomous powers to accredit post O'level and A'level certificates and diplomas. The squabble is between the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and the Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) department.

BTJET is a department in the Ministry of Education and Sports, while the NCHE is a semi-autonomous body under the same ministry.

Section b (ii) of the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, gives NCHE powers to accredit academic and professional programmes of those institutions, in consultation with professional associations and regulatory bodies.

However, the BTJET Act, 2008 gives the BTJET department powers to also accredit both programmes and training institutions in that line of education.

Section 18 of the BTJET Act gives the Industrial Training Council under the BTJET department, powers to perform several functions, including accrediting and inspecting assessment centres. With these two laws in place, a number of tertiary institutions have been compelled to pay twice to both NCHE and BTJET department for the accreditation of their programmes.

Julius Mama, the principal at Innovative Institute in Arua district, told *New Vision* that

Higher education council, BTJET clash over course accreditation



Mugerwa addressing the stakeholders during the consultative meeting yesterday. Photo by Badru Katumba

all programmes taught at the institution were accredited by the BTJET department, but revealed plans to do the same with NCHE "to be on the safe side".

"There is some confusion which needs to be rectified," he said.

Mama suggested that vocational programmes should be accredited by the BTJET department and let the NCHE

to concentrate on universities.

Gertrude Abalo, the principal of the Fisheries Training Institute in Entebbe, noted that certificate programmes were accredited by BTJET and diplomas under NCHE.

"NCHE is our mother institution through the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001, but with the BTJET Act, we are also compelled to accredit courses

Accreditation fees

Mugerwa explained that the BTJET department charges sh5m per health institution for accreditation, whereas the business and technical training institutions are currently free since the institution is yet to set fees. The fees include inspections for training institution and accreditation of programmes. Mama explained that he recently inquired about NCHE accreditation charges and he was told to pay about sh5m.

with BTJET," Abalo explained.

The issue was raised by Patrick Kibirango Mpiima, the registrar of the Allied Health Professionals Council, who said: "there is an overlapping mandate on accrediting certificate and diploma courses".

He said: "Some training institutions are accredited by BTJET department, others by NCHE and some by both, so who is who?"

Mpiima made the

remarks yesterday, during a stakeholder's consultative meeting at Arch Apartments and Hotel in Ntinda, Kampala.

NCHE, BTJET react

James Mugerwa, the assistant commissioner in charge of vocational education at the education ministry, advised that NCHE focuses on higher awards, such as postgraduate diplomas, degrees and other higher awards and "leave vocational awards to the BTJET department".

He said where universities offer direct entry for lower diplomas and certificate courses, such cases are meant to be under the vocational institutions.

"Universities continue to teach what they want, as long as the programme is accredited by NCHE and yet we want national assessment," he said.

Mugerwa noted that the recent circular by the education ministry, which provided guidelines on training, accreditation and assessment of post-O'level certificate programmes and post A'level diploma courses, gave the BTJET department powers to accredit.

However, Dr Pamela Tibihikirra-Kalyegira, the director of quality of assurance and accreditation at NCHE, defended her institution, saying: "The mandate of accreditation is given to NCHE by the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001."

She explained that the confusion is caused by the "overlapping mandate, which needs to be sorted by our mother ministry".

Mugerwa and Kalyegira agreed that there was need to amend the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001 and BTJET Act 2008, to overcome the challenge.

Ministry's take

The education ministry permanent secretary, Alex Kakooza, told *New Vision* that the ministry was set to resolve the issue. "We will invite these institutions and ensure that the overlapping mandate is overcome," he said.

He also revealed that the education ministry was poised to make amendments to both in BTJET and University and Other Tertiary Institutions acts to eliminate the overlapping mandates.