

Professional Courses: Accreditation organs must work closely with industry for good results

Posted on Apr 01, Posted by [Mwathane](#) Category [Others](#)

Debate on accreditation

The debate on the accreditation of professional courses was rekindled recently. This followed remarks allegedly made by the Registrar of the Engineers Registration Board of Kenya during a meeting with the Committee on Education and Research of the National Assembly. Impression was made that several engineering courses currently offered by some local universities have not been accredited and, therefore, enlisted students may not be registrable for professional practice on graduation. There's been previous related discussion on other professional courses. The divergence isn't good for Kenya.

Industry gives good feedback

Not long ago, I participated in a continental study by the African Land Policy Center that assessed the needs of the land governance industry against the courses offered in universities and other training institutions in Africa. This study, whose results are now informing curricula review in universities across Africa, revealed significant gaps between industry demands and the courses on offer. I have had opportunity to chair one of the local professional bodies, and also serve in one of the statutory registration boards. Experience gathered informs that for good results, the universities must work closely with industry. The pulse of industry revolves around professional bodies and their corresponding registration boards. This helps the universities to get a good feel of contemporary industry needs, and respond through suitable curricula.

Earlier in history when university enrolment was low, professional courses were few. The professional bodies and registration boards established at the time directly mapped onto the existing courses. In some cases, the university course names were literally entered in the corresponding statutes. But times have changed. Pressure to expand space for university enrolment, global trends and technological advancements have led to a multiplication of courses, and even changes in course content and names. These are realities our universities, professional bodies and registration boards, must contend and align with. Great reflection and

flexibility on the future of professional courses must hence inform their mutual discussions.

Embrace collaboration as the law provides

Prior to the establishment of the Commission for University Education (CUE), the departments that offered professional courses had structured mechanisms that ensured the involvement of professional bodies, along with registration boards, in the design and review of course curricula. These arrangements have since changed, and CUE holds mandate to accredit universities and their courses. Therefore, a good mapping of the local industry to identify professional bodies and registration boards responsible for the growth and registration of each professional discipline, followed by structured collaboration with such bodies, should be embraced. And this is provided for in the Universities Act.

Recently, I sat in a curricula review forum for one of the local universities. The range of participants included representatives from the sub-sectoral professional body and the CUE. A side chat with the CUE official revealed that they usually do this, else directly consult the pertinent professional bodies, before accrediting. But there could be gaps. Let the Ministry of Education therefore intervene to identify what informs the re-emerging contention, and help to close it objectively.

Dated 1st April, 2022

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