NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION

GUIDELINES FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

PREAMBLE

The Nigerian National Policy on Education has over the years recognized the place of open and distance learning in achieving life long education and affirms that life long education shall be the basis of the nation's education policy. It went further to state that at any stage of the educational process after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full time employment without excluding the prospect of resuming studies later.

According to the policy document, the goals of open and distance education are to:

- Provide access to quality education and equity in educational opportunities for those who otherwise would have been denied.
- Meet special needs of employers by mounting special certificate courses for their employees at their work place.
- Encourage internationalization especially of tertiary education curricula.
- Ameliorate the effect of internal and external brain drain in tertiary institutions by utilizing experts as teachers regardless of their locations or places of work.(NPE, 2004)

However. a critical appraisal of the scope of open and distance learning practice at any level of education in Nigeria against the backdrop of the long- standing recognition of its potential for increasing access to education for all socio-cultural groups, unfortunately, reveals a glaring mismatch between policy and practice even in the face of obvious and widely acknowledged perennial inadequacies of the conventional face-to-face mode, in meeting the higher educational aspirations of a large number of Nigerians, especially in the university sub-sector.

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Situation analysis

The reality in the Nigerian university system is that there is the need to distinguish between open learning and distance education. True openness especially in terms of entry requirement is to be considered a longer -term objective against the backdrop of the reality in the nation's university education scenario which is characterized by perennial mismatch between the demand and supply side of the access equation. The current situation is that there are thousands of young qualified candidates seeking university admission who cannot be absorbed into the nation's universities.

An analysis of the state of ODL in the Nigerian university system reveals that :

➢ The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is currently the only Uni-mode university mandated for Open and Distance Learning in the delivery of university education.

➢ There are about six universities which may be regarded as dual- mode universities with limited capacity to deliver degree programmes by the open and distance learning (ODL) in addition to the conventional face-to-face mode

➢ All stakeholders agree that the practice of distance learning by these dual mode universities is far below acceptable best practice and that at best, they are in transition from the running of part-time/ sandwich courses to distance learning

RATIONALE FOR OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING GUIDELINES

In order to bring the Practice of distance learning up to speed with global practice, it is incumbent on NUC as the statutory quality assurance agency in the Nigerian university system, to streamline the practice of distance learning by stipulating a code of good practice.
Such a document should clearly enunciate performance standards pertaining to the entire gamut of teaching and learning by the ODL mode including learner support which is a critical success factor in open and distance learning;

Eligibility to offer degree programmes by the ODL mode

It is within the purview of the guidelines to stipulate eligibility criteria for Nigerian universities intent on offering degree programmes by the ODL mode..

Effective from the date these guidelines become operational:

- All existing dual mode universities shall apply to NUC for re-validation / accreditation as ODL institutions
- All universities interested in offering degree programmes by the ODL mode shall apply to NUC in writing indicating the academic programmes and the specific academic discipline(s) they intend to offer by the ODL mode.
- Interested universities shall complete the necessary application formats indicating the human and material resources including learner support facilities available to guarantee sustainable teaching and learning
- Such universities shall be evaluated by a panel of ODL experts from within and outside the Nigerian university system for purposes of accreditation to offer ODL programmes.

Only universities accredited to offer degree programmes shall be granted approval to run degree programmes in the specific academic discipline(s) in which they have verifiable competence

Scope of ODL activities (academic disciplines to be taught)

Cognizant of the need to contextualize the applicability of the various ODL delivery modalities, the ODL mode shall not be applicable to academic disciplines in a university that does not have capability for that discipline.
In view of the nation's present technological and infrastructural challenges, the academic disciplines which may be offered by the ODL mode within the short to medium -term (2009-2015) are :

- Education
- Administration /Management Sciences
- Social sciences
- Arts/Humanities
- Sciences and Applied Sciences

The   ODL guidelines in the Nigerian university system stipulate as follows:

Entry requirements/ students

➢ All entrants into degree programmes offered by ODL must meet the minimum national requirements for university registration

The nature of ODL

➢ For all academic programmes to be taught by ODL, interactive texts shall be at the heart of teaching and learning. These shall be supplemented with other resources such as: CDROM: DVD: or USB sticks to deliver; e-books, simulations, assessment etc

➢ ODL means that students should not be required to attend classes or have face-to-face contact, unless there are compelling reasons to justify it. Such as Examinations, periodic facilitation and practicum.

- ➢ ODL programmes shall be predicated on a pedagogy that is led by resources and not reliant on face-to-face intervention

- ➢ students should be able to register to study anywhere in Nigeria or any part of the world with a common standard of service at any study centre

- ➢ The study centre system should offer both academic and social support. Study centres should act as the focal points of learning communities and have agreed standards of accommodation in facilities and equipment.

- ➢ Collaboration between providers, e.g. in 'university centres' will offer a cost effective means of providing study centres.

- ➢ Students should be expected to be able to have access to ICT to assist their learning. For specific programmes, functional internet access would be required for all study centres

- ➢ Assessment will include continuous assessment (a minimum of one marked assignment for each 40 hours of study) as well as summative assessment, e.g. exams , portfolios, that provide for validation of achievement

- ➢ It is expected that assessment tasks will occupy a minimum of 10% of study time. The course score should depend on both the continuous and final assessment.

- ➢ Effective marking and feedback require rapid return – a target maximum of 3 weeks is appropriate but ICT may allow this to be reduced. Such standards will be necessary to ensure ODL awards have a high reputation.

- ➢ Loading on staff may be reduced by the use of automatically marked ICT-based Assignments.

The guidelines for best practice in ODL, shall cover the following aspect :

- Philosophy
The Philosophy should include clear statements on :
Accessibility;
Flexibility; and
Lifelong learning

- Objectives
The Objectives of the programme should be well articulated

- Admissions

All entrants into degree programmes offered by ODL must meet the minimum national requirements for university admission

- Curriculum
- The curriculum for each academic programme to be offered by ODL shall be congruent with the approved MAS/ BMAS for the programme. The learning outcomes shall be clearly articulated in terms of competencies, skills and behavioural attributes

- Pedagogy

- Learning objectives should be well defined
- Pedagogy should be appropriate to meet the Learning objectives
- For all academic programmes offered by ODL, well written Study guides should lead study
- Programmes should be updated at appropriate frequency

- Learning resources should :
- Be tailored to ODL, i.e are interactive, comprehensive, accessible, contemporary etc.
- Make appropriate use of media and ICT.
- Meet international quality standards.

- Evaluation and assessment
- Continuous assessment should be well entrenched to promote learning through feedback and should include tutor marked assignments(TMAs)

and Computer marked assignments(CMAs) appropriate to the programme.

- Evaluation and assessment should include Summative assessment that validate achievement of Learning objectives

- Evaluation and assessment process should have demonstrable integrity

- External moderation should be an integral part of the evaluation and assessment process

- Staffing

- There should be adequate qualified faculty for programme leadership, resource and assessment generation, and tutor monitoring- normally a minimum of 6 academic staff should be associated with each academic programme but staff may also be associated with other programmes
` Academic staff mix-by-rank should comply with the NUC guidelines of Professorial cadre: Senior Lectureship: Lecturer 1 and below in the ratio of 20:35:45 for comparability of quality and standard.

- Staff should be appropriately skilled in terms of subject and ODL pedagogy.

- Student advisers should be available for information, assistance and guidance (IAG)

- There should be a Minimum of 2 administrative staff for not more than a cluster of four academic programmes.
- The institution should have the ability to demonstrate technical support (in-house or outsourced)

- Each study centre should be staffed in line with national policy (at least a Senior
  Lecturer) including IT support staff.

- Academic learner support

- Each academic programme should have adequate tutor:student ratio, normally 1:50
- Tutors should be trained or have validated ODL qualifications (through orientation, seminars, on-line workshops, conferences on ODL programmes).
- Channels of communication should be diverse and cater for student need, i,e. surface mail, phone, email etc.

- Marking and feedback meet international standards.
- Feedback on assignments and examinations should be prompt (within 3 weeks and within 10 weeks respectively) and should reflect areas of students' weaknesses, strengths and appropriate corrections

- Information, advice and guidance IAG

- Facilities for IAG should be consistent with institutional policy and Learner Support Framework that reflect national policy and best practices.

- Programme specific IAG should be available (including Student counselling services)

- Administration

- There should be verifiable evidence of strong general logistics to support the academic programmes of the ODL centre.

- There should be verifiable evidence of availability of special institutional support (e.g. advice, software, power supply) that has particular relevance within the programme

- There should be a robust Management information System (MIS) that enables programme monitoring

- Efficiency

- There should be verifiable evidence of input and output of established students enrolled in each of the academic programmes

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Programme accreditation

 The Table below lists the programme attributes that would be evaluated with respect to approved ODL programmes at accredited ODL institutions/centres.

These performance indicators concentrate on programme specific concerns including some aspects of institutional accreditation carried forward from the Institutional process.

Attribute	Description	Weight	Comment
Philosophy and Objectives	• Consistency with University policy • Objectives are clearly stated • Clearly stated and consistent with ODL philosophy **Sub-total**	1% 1% 1% **3%**	
Admissions	• Consistent with the national minimum admission requirements	3%	
Curriculum	• Consistent with MAS	5%	
Pedagogy/ Learning Resources	• Learning objectives(LOs) must be well defined in Self Learning Materials(SLM)	3%	
	• Pedagogy used in SLM is appropriate to meet the LOs	3%	
	• Study guide leads the learner to use the SLM effectively	3%	
	• SL material are updated frequently at least once every 5 years	2%	
	• SLM are tailored to ODL, i.e. interactive, comprehensive,	5%	

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	accessible, contemporary, learner friendly.		
	• LR reflects the use of ICT.	5%	
	• LR are of international standards. e.g. e-learning	2%	
	• LR relevant to the programme are provided e.g. labs, studios, practice placement	5%	
	• Creativity/innovation in LR provision	2%	
	Sub-total	**30%**	
Evaluation and assessment	• Continuous assessment that promotes learning through feedback – meets national standards of contact , includes Tutor marked assignments(TMAs) and Computer marked assignments(CMAs) appropriate to the programme.	3%	
	• Summative assessment that validates achievement of Learning objectives	3%	
	• Process has demonstrable integrity e.g. quality of examiners, examination approval procedures, exam misconduct, etc.	2%	
	• There is evidence of external moderation	2%	
	Sub-total	**10%**	
Staffing	• Adequate qualified faculty for programme leadership, resource and assessment generation, and tutor monitoring- normally a minimum of 6 associated with programme. Although Staff may also be associated with other programmes.	3%	IAG Staff ratio to be determined Some programmes may require additional technical staff – these may be scored under the IAG heading
	• Faculty appropriately skilled in terms of subject and ODL pedagogy.	2%	

	• Student advisors (IAG) should be available.	2%	
	• Minimum 2 admin staff for a maximum of 4 programmes and ability to demonstrate technical support in-house or outsourced.	1%	
	• Study centres staffed in line with national policy (Leader at least a Senior Lecturer) including IT support staff.	2%	
	Sub-total	**10%**	
Academic learner support	• Adequate tutor: student ratio, normally 1:50	3%	
	• Tutors have relevant ODL training through workshops, conferences, seminars on ODL.	3%	
	• Channels of communication are diverse and cater for student need, i,e. surface mail, phone, e-mail etc.	3%	
	• Marking and feedback meet international standards.	3%	
	• Feedback on assignments and examinations are prompt (within 3 and 10 weeks respectively)	3%	
	Sub-total	**15%**	
Information, advice and guidance IAG	• Consistent with institutional policy and Learner Support Framework that reflect national policy.	5%	Learner Support Framework should list the required interactions and IAG capabilities
	• Programme specific IAG available. Including Student counselling service	5%	
	Sub-total	**10%**	
Administration	• Verifiable evidence of strong general logistics to support the academic programmes of the ODL centre.	1%	

	• Availability of special institutional support (e.g. advice, software, power supply) that has particular relevance within the programme.	2%	
	• A robust Management Information System (MIS) that enables programme monitoring	2%	
	Sub-total	**5%**	
Efficiency	• Verifiable evidence of input and output rates	4%	
Employer feedback	• Feedback from employers of graduates	3%	
Viability	• Assessed through demonstration of provision and efficient utilization of required resources- staff, infrastructure, study centres and funds	3%	The budget balance is a matter for the university – accreditation should establish commitment to deliver the programme.

Notes:

* To earn **Full accreditation** status, a programme must score **at least 70%** in each of the core areas of:
➢ Pedagogy/ Learning Resources;
➢ Academic learner support + Information, advice and guidance IAG (pooled)
➢ Evaluation and assessment ,
➢ Staffing

** Detailed scoring schemes and guide to programme evaluators, are to be found in the Programme Evaluation Form for ODL programmes(NUC/ PEF/ ODL).