



**IMPLEMENTING QUALITY EDUCATION STANDARDS:
A CONSIDERATION OF THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITY
INITIATIVES**

By

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**A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 6TH NAPE UAP
LEADERSHIP FORUM
CALABAR.**



Saturday, February 25, 2006

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It was Albert Einstein the Great Scientist who said

“To create the future, we will need a huge shift in thinking, values, and action”.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to come along on a journey as we together survey a future for Higher Education that we seek to create.

I. Background / Overview

University education has come a long way since the Medieval Prototype University established in Bologna, Oxford and Paris in the 12th –13th Centuries. Since the scientific revolution of the 17th –18th centuries, there has been a clamour for university reforms and a need for universities to be more socially responsive. Although most African universities were built on the desire to train locally, local personnel to serve the demands of the newly independent states. However, regardless of the historical changes, one thing that has not changed much from medieval universities is the principle of University structure and organization. Let us therefore begin by clarifying what a University is.

“Universities are organizations engaged in the advancement of knowledge; they teach, train and examine students in a variety of scholarly, scientific and professional fields. Intellectual pursuits define the highest prevailing levels of competence in these fields. The universities confer degrees and provide opportunities both for members of their teaching staff and for some of their students to do original research” (Ben-David, 1968 - *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*).

Inherent in this definition is the question of highest prevailing competence which implies a commitment to quality measurement of some sort; Quality being defined as The Standard of something as measured against other things or General excellence of standard or level. The key word is **standards**. The main challenges that universities have had to grapple with are in the area of funding, governance and academic standards. It is with a view to resolving the issues posed by these challenges, i.e., meeting the challenge of relating higher education to the needs of society (Ogunrinde, 1997), that the issues that form the focus of concern for this particular conference are pertinent. It is pertinent to point out that the core mission of a university is to train the intellect in the service of humanity. Ogunrinde (1997) in reference to Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, states “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality”. Covenant University via its strategic developmental and operational plan and current practice has set to make this fundamental in the realisations of its goals and objective.

It is however important at this point in this presentation to state the observations of Ogunrinde’s (1997) observations with respect to the experiences of many African

Countries with respect to education. I would also like to note that although these observations were made in 1997, the issues are still real even today. Universities and research institutes in Europe and America for example, demonstrate their social relevance not only through their esoteric research but also through their contribution to meeting the needs of industry (Oni, 2003). It is for these many reasons and experiences that Covenant University was birthed. Again, to also fulfil the liberation mandate as has been mentioned in some other section of this write up, of its founding mission. Liberation indeed derives from the issues as will be espoused here in the lines following. Many African countries are going through a traumatic crisis in their educational system. He describes this crisis as one of maladjustment or crisis of relevance- of education failing to meet the needs of society in a rapidly changing world. Another traumatic experience from a crisis perspective is that of the crisis of diminishing resources. The demand for education, particularly university education has been explosive, and successive governments have not been able to meet up with the ever-increasing demands on higher education. Again a major challenge here is that of expanding access and the resource to provide the access. University education has always been driven by the challenge of on expanding enrolment (Ogunrinde, 1997). He categorically stated that

“the size of a university warned Ashby cannot be doubled ‘just as the size of a football team cannot be doubled without introducing grave functional dislocation’. In the 21st century, demographic changes will fuel the issue of expansion. Between 1970 and 1980, Africa’s population grew by 2.9%. By the year 2000, Africa’s primary and secondary school population is expected to grow at 3.3% annually. At the same time, resources for education in Africa are already over-stretched by competition from other public services and the servicing of external debts while the economic stability requires a balance between expansion and fiscal resources in order to maintain quality. As Professor Grobbelaar describes it, it is a challenge ‘making do with less and

maintaining quality'. ... There is a need for expansion in some universities, while others will have to consolidate.”

The issues enumerated above suggest an obvious strain on the educational system and have inadvertently affected the quality and standards put in place. It is not practical to expect that the scenario would be different with continuing financial dependence of universities on government. Again the impact of socio-economic upheaval and the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and their attendant effects and repercussions left their on scars on the educational system of Universities. It was therefore important to seek alternative ways out of this so-called chasm. It is important to however note that despite the issues contained in the forgoing, human societies require Universities. Universities are not an added extra, they are an essential part of the fabric of our civilisation, educational provision, our search for new knowledge and our civic life. (Thomas, 2002). This is one of the many reasons that drive the mission and vision of Covenant University.

The Private University Initiative

The Privatisation of Higher Education has rapidly grown internationally. This has been spurred on by the World Bank (1994), which encourages the expansion of Private Higher Education sectors to assist ailing economies and shrinking educational budget especially in developing countries. The underlying rationale is that the role of the private providers is to complement the public sector. (Mabizela & Subotzky, 2002). Obasanjo (2000) maintained that Private Universities have an important role to play in the revitalisation of the country's educational system. The educational landscape in the Nigerian context has changed since the introduction of Private Universities in the Higher Educational sector. The most obvious criteria for

defining Private Universities is the nature and extent of the nation's financial contributions and its control or regulation of the said University and its function. All over the world, investment in University education is a critical component of national development effort. Nations today depend increasingly on knowledge, idea and skills, which are produced in Universities (World Bank, 1996). Investment in University Education is a critical component of national development. Nation States invest in University Education because Society expects it to contribute to national development in three principal ways:-

- 1) Society expects its University to produce highly skilled personnel in technology, engineering, management and other professions.
- 2) Universities have the responsibility of producing their own crop of academic personnel that is, the intellectual resource pool that will, through scientific research generate new knowledge, and innovation to solve development problems.
- 3) Universities produce the teachers, administrators and managers for other levels of human resources development institutions.(Oni,1999); Azikiwe (1960) earlier remarked that the

**“intellectual brilliance in the university is useless,
unless specific contributions after graduation
justify it.” (P286)**

THE Private University approach is therefore set out with the clear objective to help the Nation achieve its main objectives for the University system. At the moment there are 23 Licensed Private Universities at the last count with several more waiting for their licences.

It is important however to point out that Private Universities represent a greater diversity than Government owned ones for various reasons some of which are

1. The ownership and Governance structures. The variations of these are quite wide. While some private Universities have a Governing Council, others have a Board of Regents and all this is reflected in the structure in place. Some are owned by individuals while others belong to organisations such as Churches etc
2. Varying degrees of funding – A cursory look at the Private Universities in Nigeria makes it obvious that the availability of funding is not uniform across board. This has direct influence on the states of the University, the size of its student population and the kinds of programmes offered.
3. The Different Visions/Philosophical Bases – The Different Private Universities while subscribing to the Universal ethos of the University are built on differing philosophies and Visions. This diversity is significantly more obvious for the Private Universities than the Federal varsities.

As a result of these differences I would be addressing our topic by using our experience at Covenant University to highlight initiatives as used at our University and the motivations behind these initiatives.

Let me at this point state that Covenant University is not just a private University but a Christian Mission University driving its performance on firm values. Covenant University's arrival on the educational stage is in response as would be seen from its objectives and strategic plan to the issues raised above and others outside of it. Its operational stance is reactive, proactive and anticipatory in terms of now-term, short-term and futuristic goals and mission. The key point to note is that of the need to seek relevance and results that are usable and impactful. It is also obvious that from a close inspection of the curriculum at Covenant University, the luxury of higher education just for its

own sake is obsolete. Education must be directed to an end use. It must be tied to the delivery of a product, which must have social use and relevance.

As we address our subject of quality it is important to highlight the challenges to higher education in Nigeria / Africa. Some of them are:

- Provision of necessary financial resources, equipment and an environment conducive to academic work.
- Few placement opportunities for the burgeoning number of students turned out yearly
- Low moral standards / social vices among prevalent among youths and Adolescents in Nigeria today. (Nigerian universities today face innumerable problems such as cultism, hooliganism, sexual promiscuity, examination malpractice, social maladjustment frequent strikes leading to prolongation of academic sessions and the attendant problems following.
- Inadequate physical resource provisions and basic infrastructure such as hostel accommodation lecture rooms, library, laboratories and equipment. It is impossible to promote a conducive learning and empowering environment without these in place.
- Lack of foresight in the provision of reforms in Higher education in Nigeria / Africa for the promotion of sustainable human development.
- “Brain drain” and the challenge of redirecting skills of Africans in Diaspora.

It is against the backdrop of these challenges that the vision/goals/objectives of Covenant University emerged. This is along side its part in the liberation vision of the World Mission Agency’s mandate to give man a practical orientation for taking up responsibility. A primary objective is the development of the total man through emphasizing his spiritual, intellectual and physical development. (Covenant University Handbook, 2002).

In the light of all these challenges it becomes obvious that maintaining quality in the University is a multi faceted factor involving each of the factors listed as they affect the capability of the University to deliver on its promise.

There are three main key things that University leadership or Governance can deliver to the University to maintain quality. These are in effect

1. Deliver Governance that addresses University performance issues such as structure, equipment, staffing and funding
2. Drive Quality matters and
3. Have effective quality assurance processes

What are the operational imperatives of managing Universities for quality?

In ensuring Quality in the University it becomes obvious that several strands must be pulled together to ensure the maintenance of standards in the University. Some of these strands are

1. Context – The context of a University determines what its expectations are and therefore its quality. Context in this case is defined by its environment, its vision and the setting. This includes such issues as the motivational matters and issues that have to deal with the provision of leadership and inspiration. These provide the fundamental framework on which quality can be built. At Covenant University we believe that this fundamental framework is an essential platform for whatever other achievement can be made including quality.
2. Staffing – The quality and the quantity of staffing is an essential component of quality and performance. The current accreditation process used by NUC puts a high premium on staffing matters

3. Facilities and related matters – The availability of facilities such as equipment, spaces, chemicals and even accommodation are a necessary contributor of quality
4. The University's external barometers – The standards or quality parameters which a University sets itself are a key driver of quality as they become a motivation for the Leaders and Staff to strive for.
5. University activities geared towards achieving the quality standards

In the light of these therefore, what then is Covenant University doing to achieve and maintain quality?

To do this the following essentials must be engaged which can be described as:–

a) Contextual Issues

Several contextual issues which have effect on quality are a major function of our quality drive viz

1. Vision and visionary / transformational leadership.

The leadership question in every facet of an enterprise requires that leaders hold their position by merit of performance, capability and quality of their product rather than by patronage or other non- productivity /non-proactive parameters. This may pose a serious challenge to the question of governance in the Nigerian Higher education sectors where lobbying, “godfatherism” and ethnic representation have been seriously entrenched.

In this area, the Covenant University is privileged to be led by a Visionary Dr. David Oyedepo the Visioner, Chancellor and Chairman of the Board of Regents of Covenant University supported by the entire Living Faith Church worldwide. This is reflected in the massive financial support pouring into making

the University a Place of excellence. In addition a rigorous approach to attaining quality is reflected in the selection of the University's top management.

2. The University's founders led by the Chancellor have articulated a University Motto which is "Promoting Mental Productivity" premised on the philosophical pillars listed below-

- A departure from form to skill
- A departure from knowledge to empowerment
- A departure from figures to future building
- A departure from legalism to realism
- A departure from points to facts
- A departure from **mathe-matics** to **life-matics**

3. The University has developed, articulated and continued to drive its core values which are an essential part of its achievements till date. These core values are: Spirituality, Positive Mentality, Capacity Building, Integrity, Responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice. These core values create a momentum for achievement at the Universities.

4. Financial Discipline – Covenant University has been built to date with a budget which supports the imperative of finance. The result is a financial outlay far below what it would cost in a public sector. Let me show you a repeat on the earlier slides to see some of what has been achieved on the campus. In addition while the University has embarked on some expensive ventures such as sponsoring and hosting the International Workshop on Pattern Discovery, the first of its kind in Africa and the International Conference on Human Development these activities have been designed to enhance the quality of our product and by and large they have succeeded. As

a result of this the University is committed to spending but only in line with its main drive hence the effect on quality.

5. The Board of Regents of Covenant University has shown commitment to its promise to research and development. A number of research projects have been supported and sponsored. Huge sums of monies have also been committed to research, workshop and conference attendance. This is one area that the Chancellor has often stressed that the Board of Regents of Covenant University will stop at nothing to ensure that research is promoted and supported, regardless of the cost implication. Contribution to expanding the frontiers of knowledge is the motivating force here. This particular stance will promote a research culture, which will further inform an atmosphere and context of inquiry, problem identification and the proffering of solutions thus, enhancing quality
6. The University has set itself immediate strategic goals of Pioneering excellence which are articulated at every opportunity. And this has been packaged as Vision 2009. These goals are

1. Pioneering Excellence

1. Pioneering Excellence as Teachers
2. Pioneering Excellence as Researchers
3. Pioneering Excellence as Workers
4. Pioneering Excellence as Persons

2. Achieving Cutting Edge

1. Cutting Edge in Equipment usage
2. Cutting Edge in Staff Output
3. Cutting Edge in Knowledge
4. Establishing benchmarks for linkages across the African/World contexts

5. Developing effective utilising of on line linkages for knowledge banking and access

3. Producing Quality Students

1. Developing an effective Academic adviser / Student mentoring programme
2. Developing a career Counselling/Preparatory programme
3. Establishing the self development centre

2. Achieving Staff Engagement in the Vision implementation

1. Staff Commitment in time and effort
2. Staff involvement in execution and implementation of Programmes

3. Making Community Impact

1. Relevant Public Lectures/seminars
2. Major Public ideas contribution
3. Community impact programming

b) Staffing

The University has maintained a commitment to continuous enhancement of its staff strength and quality. This is manifested in several ways. Some of this include

□ Serious recruitment drive

The University's drive for internal and external efficiency is reflected in its continuous drive for high quality staff. This included a head hunt embarked upon to identify and recruit high caliber staff. New Salary scales have also been introduced to ensure that the best in quality is maintained.

As a result of this drive Covenant University recruited in the last session alone the University recruited 67 new lecturers including 11 professorial grade staff and 13 Senior Lecturers. The result of this recruitment is reflected for one college in the Table Below:

5.1 Table 1 shows the academic staff/Student strength of the College of Science and Technology

Table 1. Academic Staff/Student Strength

S/N	DEPT	NO. FULL - TIME	NO. STUDENTS	STAFF: STUDENT RATIO
1	ARCHITECTURE	7	177	1:15
2	COMP. & INFO. SC.	17	444	1:26
3	ENGINEERING	17	928	1:55
4	ESTATE MGT.	7	73	1:10
5	PHYSICAL SCIENCES	15	21	1:14
	TOTAL	63	1643	1:24

The implication of this is that given that the average National ratio is 1:26 across all disciplines this reflects a continuous improvement in our Staff Student's ratio with consequent effects on our quality especially bearing in mind that the ratio for Sciences is significantly higher than others. The University is committed to continuing on this executive hunt with a strong intent to reach much higher standards.

□ Training –

Teaching seminars, presentation seminar

The University held a number of training seminars on teaching and academic service delivery skills. In the last year alone four such seminars were held at the University. The topics which were designed to enhance the quality of teaching delivery were as follows:

- i. Effective Teaching in Higher Education
- ii. Measurement Testing and Evaluation in Higher Education
- iii. Effective Presentation: An Overview of PowerPoint
- iv. Training for Academic Advisers for Covenant University

The University is committed to training as a continuing tool for improving staff skills

□ Weekly University Staff Assembly

Every week University staff have a three hour assembly to round up the week during which time issues are reviewed and the Vice Chancellor and the Chancellor use the sessions to maintain the University's core values and drive quality and performance issues.

□ Staff Development

The University's dedication to Staff development is such that all Staff currently without Ph.D. are undergoing Postgraduate programmes to continue to enhance the quality of our Staff and over the next 2 – 3 years from Internal staff Covenant University is expecting an addition of over 100 Ph.D. holders through this process. In addition rigorous promotion processes have been put in place to consolidate the University's commitment to quality.

“The more actors understand about their situation, the more they will be able to make judgments and take actions that are likely to anticipate emerging circumstances”

Barnett (2000) *Realizing the University in an age of Super complexity*. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

c) Facilities

Covenant University continues to be committed to expanding and improving its facilities to further enhance the quality of output it produces. This is reflected in many areas. For example the Centre for Learning resources (Library) has just moved into its state of the Art Library complex which is reputed to be one of the Largest in Africa. Its collection has moved from nothing to over 18,000 volumes, 230 foreign Journals and 150 local journals all of which are the latest editions. In addition the University through its e-component is subscribed to networks which provide access to over 20,000 journals online across all disciplines. This is expected to further improve this year with a target to increase to over 100,000 volumes, foreign Journals to 600 and local ones to 500 as well as further development of a Full Multimedia Unit and Information Literacy laboratory equipped with 100 computers with internet Access. This same commitment to quality improvement is reflected in the growth of our Laboratories, classrooms and other facilities within the University.

d) The University's external barometers

At Covenant University we have set ourselves effective barometers against which to assess our output and performance. This we have done bearing in mind that it is the quality of the Standards that determine the validity of the process. Bearing this in mind, the University has set itself three sets of Standards. These are:-

- a. NUC and University wide Benchmarks for Nigeria. These are obviously the first challenge of standards. As you are aware, the NUC has been driving quality in the Nigerian University system by tightening the process for accreditation within the University system. At CU we have driven our quality to ensure that our programmes all meet the acceptable standards. We are pleased that at the last NUC exercise not only were all programmes accredited but CU was adjudged the best in the entire exercise in the Nation.
- b. Professionalism – At CU we are determined to ensure that all our programmes also meet and exceed the Standards for Professional practice. This we are working on continuously be achieving affiliation and accreditation with all the professional bodies who have been invited to validate the quality of our programmes. We are pleased to announce that this process has been going on very well allowing us to maintain and validate our quality in the light of practical qualifications. In this regard, let me also point out that we are very eager to foster relationships with organisations and professional bodies such as yours and we are seeking ways to strengthen these relationships as a way to further improve on our quality. In addition as we embark on our endowment drive one clear objective will be the highlighting of interactive endowments and facilities which will enhance the input of these bodies in the quality of our delivery
- c. International Standards – At CU we are determined to have a World Class University and one way to move closer to this dream is by using these Universities as our Standards for

growth. The Vice Chancellor, the management team and the Academic Planning Unit in various Universities have highlighted the key elements required and the University with the support of the Board of Regents is working consistently towards meeting these standards. We have also studied and continue to study the guidelines for international ranking of Universities and use these as guidelines for our own progress

d. New Programmes - CU is also pleased to be in the Vanguard of setting new benchmarks for new programmes which are necessary for the growth of our nation. The creation of these programmes we believe will expand the considerations of quality education especially opening the horizon for innovative approaches to programming with inherent effect on quality

e) University activities geared towards achieving the quality standards

The University as reflected in its pioneering excellence document has set itself ambitious targets towards achieving its objectives and it is obvious that they are unattainable without maintaining internal and external efficiencies. This session certain steps have been taken towards this objective. These are

□ Instituting Quality Control Procedures –TQA

The University instituted some Quality control procedures by instituting a monthly Teaching quality Assessment (TQA) designed to monitor the quality of teaching by staff and identify weaknesses with a view to providing support for the staff in improving efficiency.

□ Business like approach to deadlines and timelines. The University has maintained a business like approach to timetables and deadlines

driven by Heads of Departments and members of the University Management. The drive has resulted in Exam results being ready as projected

□ HOD'S moderation of exams and lecture notes

HOD'S, Professors and other senior academics have played an active role in moderating examination questions and lecture notes. All academic staff are expected to have their lecture notes vetted and approved by their professors to maintain quality

□ Regular Management Meeting

The regular management meetings serve as avenues for a for getting reports and feedback on performance and implementation of decisions taken by management

□ Business Sessions

Business Sessions are also arranged regularly to review and address issues raised by staff especially matters of performance and output.

These several areas highlighted indicate Covenant University's internal processes for maintaining quality. However, one other area of impact of the private Universities from the Covenant University end is the effect on the overall atmosphere of University Education thus challenging the status quo and moving it along the paths of higher quality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in this paper we have, using Covenant University as a Case Study highlighted the possible contributions or approaches which a

Private University may bring to the quality question. Some of these areas will be highlighted:

In addition to all of these, the University is also contributing to the re-engineering of the landscape by:

- ✓ The achievement of the financial outlay required and the subsequent effective use of resources has provided a benchmark for possibilities of financial management and prudence, thereby providing an empowering working and learning context. The result is the promotion of a rich educational culture and the provision of qualitative learning in a qualitative context.
- ✓ On the national scene, the energy generated by private directives has been wonderfully showcased by Covenant University's development thus challenging previously accepted limitations. For example, never in the history of Nigeria has any university started on its permanent site. However, Covenant University made history on the 21st of October 2002, by admitting its charter students on its permanent site with the full works and complements of facilities in place.
- ✓ The guidelines provided in the *Students' Handbook* with regard to student behaviour and conduct are enforced and have begun to instil a culture and a new path for addressing the spiralling problem of youth delinquency which seems to have pervaded Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Youth delinquency is one of the major inhibitors of quality. Covenant University has thus become a flag bearer in the provision of alternative approaches to addressing this problem.

The Quality Issue is in my view one that is intrinsic to the University system's delivery of its mandate to the nation and we are convinced that for it to be achieved it must not only be attained it must be maintained and fostered nation wide. At Covenant University we are glad to be in the Vanguard of the move to maintain quality. It was Aristotle who said

“We are what we repeatedly do; excellence then is not an act but a habit.”

Quality is something that must be done day in day out, it should be sustained and maintained if the result is to be permanent. World Class Universities such as Harvard have maintained their drive and we believe that to do this so must we. In the Words of John Maxwell **Success is not an event. It is an ongoing process we engage in time and time again..... We must focus on the habit of excellence; practising success, repeatedly day after day”**

Thank you for Listening.

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