Two private universities closed

**By Conan Businge
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Two private universities, which have been operating on provisional licences, have been closed by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE).

The council, which is mandated by the Government and law to manage institutions of higher learning, through its executive director Prof. Mary Okwakol, revealed that two universities have been closed.

Okwakol made the revelation yesterday at the launch of a new Information Management Information System (IMIS) commissioned by the state minister for higher education, Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo.

Much as Okwakol declined to name the two universities, sources say one of them is in Kampala and the other, in eastern Uganda.

The council officials said they will officially release the names after its resolutions have been gazetted by the Solicitor General, as required by the law.

The closure of the two universities has reduced the number to 48 from 50 in the country.

In January this year, NCHE warned 32 private universities operating without a charter but with provisional licences, that they risked being closed.

Over the 32 private universities warned and operating with provisional licences, 26 of them have gone past the required provisional three years of operation without a charter. Their provisional licences had also expired.

Sources at the council say a number of universities such as Victoria University and the International University of East Africa have already applied for charters and have been lined up for inspection, before they are granted.

The closure of two universities brings the number of closed universities to three in the last two years.

In May 2017, NCHE closed Busoga University, and warned Stafford University.

The council, in the same Uganda Gazette, warned Lijif International American College of Health Sciences.

The council notes: "The revocation of the provisional licence does not affect the validity of any certificate, diploma, and degree or other academic award granted by the university when still under the provisional licence."

However, according to Section 98(3) of the University and Tertiary Institutions Act, a university whose provisional licence has been revoked may re-apply after two years from the date of revocation.

New information system

Meanwhile, NCHE is going to start running all its data and information on an Integrated Management Information System to ease access to information by students and officials.

The IMIS system, according to Okwakol, is key in supporting the growth and expansion of the higher education sub-sector.

Okwakol said the system had been developed by future technologies with support from Africa Development Bank and it automates both internal and external services of the council.

Muyingo said this is a positive shift in the provision of higher education in the country.

"This is well aligned to Uganda National Development Plan for an industrialised Uganda, through information communication and technology," he said.

Muyingo said the digitising of the council's services is the way to go in the 21st century.

"I hope that all students and officials will make good use of this system to ease service delivery in a modern and technological society."

The director research development and documentation at the council, Dr Nora Mulira, said the system will help to monitor compliance of institutions of higher learning, equate qualifications, and certify new institutions, among other uses.

She said it will also help in validating academic documents online, to reduce on the congestion at NCHE's offices, which is always caused by the long lines arising from the manual clearances," she said.

The Ministry of ICT and National Guidance permanent secretary, Vincent Bagiire, said in the ongoing broadband internet connectivity, the institutions of higher learning were a key target.

He disclosed that many universities lack affordable internet connectivity and this would soon be addressed by the Government.

He said the ICT ministry, through the National Information Technology Authority Uganda, is implementing the National Backbone Infrastructure Project, intended to increase cheap internet access across the country.

He said currently, about 3,000km of fibre optic cable have been laid, in about 500 locations, and the process to lay another 1,000km is ongoing.

Muyingo interacting with Okwakol at the National Council for Higher Education headquarters yesterday. Photo by Mary Kansiime