
ZAMBIA: Plans for new qualifications authority

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Plans to introduce a new higher education qualifications authority in Zambia have reached an advanced stage and the government is working on opening three new university colleges next month. Education Minister Professor Geoffrey Lungwangwa told parliament that large construction projects were also underway at the nation's universities in an effort to improve the learning environment for students and staff.

A concept paper on the National Qualification Framework and National Qualification Authority had been developed and was at an advanced stage, Lungwangwa said, adding that consultations with other countries were being planned to obtain information about the establishment of such an authority.

A Teaching Council Draft Bill would be presented to stakeholders for input before going to Cabinet, and a literacy policy was being developed, he said. The first intakes at three new university colleges would start in May.

The Nkrumah and Copperbelt Colleges of Education were being upgraded and transformed into university colleges and would open with an intake of 600 students. The academic calendars of the colleges would be aligned with that of the University of Zambia, "under whose academic superintendence the institutions will fall".

Five billion Kenyan shillings (US\$6.5 million) had been allocated for infrastructure development at the colleges. Mulakupikwa University College, which would train prospective teachers in mathematics, science and information technology, would also have its first intake in May.

"My ministry has introduced a fast track distance education diploma upgrading programme for teachers," Lungwangwa said. "This programme is for upgrading diploma-holder teachers to degree level and it will be offered by the University of Zambia."

The programme would start in May with an initial intake of 6,000 teachers and would cost K3.5 billion.

A proposal by the founding council of Mulungushi University that the institution be named the Levy Patrick Mwanawasa School for Leadership Development, after the late Zambian president, had been approved.

Lungwangwa said an application for education funding from the World Bank had been endorsed, and Zambia's main donors had indicated their commitment to increase funding support to the education sector.

Zambia had committed 17% of the national budget to education, according to the Minister, and programmes and activities would tackle four priority areas - access and participation, improving learning achievement and education quality, improving equity, and making the system efficient.

He added that public universities had been allocated resources for infrastructure development that would improve the quality life for staff and students, as well as raise academic standards through the expansion of libraries, lecture theatres and laboratories.

The construction of four student hostels at the University of Zambia and two at Copperbelt University should be completed this year.