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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OVER-RELIANCE ON PART-TIME LECTURERS THREATENS THE INTEGRITY OF COMPETENCY-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION

The growing dependence of universities on part-time academic staff, particularly where it comes at the expense of a strong and sustainable permanent academic staff establishment, raises serious concerns about the quality, credibility and future of higher education in Zambia. This concern becomes even more urgent as institutions embrace Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), which demands far more than classroom teaching, course completion and the passing of examinations.

The casualisation of academic staff is not in the best interests of higher education, the economy, the labour movement or society because it undermines job security, weakens teaching and research quality, and threatens the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions in Zambia.

Moonlighting among lecturers should not become the future of higher education in Zambia, as it can compromise teaching quality, research, student supervision, and graduate competencies.

The contributions of full-time academic staff remain singular and indispensable to the advancement of higher education, as they provide continuity in teaching, sustained engagement in research, dedicated student mentorship, and institutional leadership. Their long-term commitment strengthens academic standards, preserves institutional knowledge, fosters innovation, and supports the development of future professionals.

Consequently, the increasing casualisation of academic employment risks undermining the stability, quality, and sustainability of higher education, with far-reaching implications for economic development and societal progress in our country.

A university cannot credibly claim to be implementing competency-based education if its staffing model is designed primarily to deliver lectures rather than develop, assess and verify competencies.

Competency-based education represents a fundamental shift in how learning is organised and evaluated. It requires students to demonstrate what they know, what they can do and how effectively they can apply their knowledge and skills to real-

world problems. This cannot be achieved through lectures alone. It requires sustained academic engagement, practical supervision, continuous assessment, individualised feedback, mentorship and the systematic verification of learning outcomes.

These responsibilities demand institutional commitment, homeostasis, and academic continuity. Where universities become excessively dependent on part-time lecturers whose time and responsibilities may be divided across several institutions, their capacity to provide this sustained engagement may be compromised.

The danger is that competency-based education becomes a policy declaration on paper while examination-based education continues in practice.

WE MUST STOP CONFUSING LECTURE DELIVERY WITH COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

A lecturer can deliver a lecture, complete a teaching assignment and leave the classroom without necessarily ensuring that students have mastered the knowledge and skills they were expected to acquire.

CBC demands much more. It requires lecturers to observe students performing tasks, identify gaps in their learning, provide corrective feedback, supervise practical exercises and verify that the required competencies have been attained.

An engineering student must demonstrate the ability to solve practical engineering problems. A nursing student must demonstrate clinical competence. A teacher must demonstrate the ability to teach effectively. A business graduate must be able to apply management principles to actual organisational challenges. A journalism student must write a coherent story in correct English.

These competencies cannot be assumed merely because a student has attended lectures, submitted assignments or passed a written examination.

When universities rely excessively on part-time lecturers without adequate permanent academic capacity, they risk weakening the very processes that make competency-based education meaningful. Limited lecturer availability can undermine practical supervision, individual coaching, remedial instruction and continuous assessment.

The consequence is a dangerous possibility: graduates may obtain qualifications without adequately demonstrating the competencies those qualifications are supposed to certify.

That is not the transformation of higher education. It is the continuation of the old system under a new name.

A UNIVERSITY MUST BE MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF PART-TIME LECTURERS

No credible university can be built on the backbone of part-time academic staff. Part-time academics have a valuable role to play, but they cannot substitute for a

committed, adequately resourced, full-time academic workforce that sustains research, mentorship, academic governance, and institutional development.

Universities are not merely teaching establishments. They are centres of knowledge creation, research, innovation, professional development and intellectual leadership. A university requires academics who do more than teach assigned courses. It requires an enduring academic workforce that develops curricula, supervises research, mentors junior academics, participates in governance, strengthens quality assurance and builds the institution's reputation over time.

Staffing a university to deliver lectures in order to sell degrees and building a university to produce knowledge, develop fully competent graduates, nurture scholars, and sustain academic excellence are two fundamentally different things.

Excessive dependence on part-time lecturers can weaken these functions when such lecturers are insufficiently integrated into departmental planning, research programming, curriculum review and institutional decision-making.

Research and postgraduate supervision require continuity. Curriculum development requires collective academic ownership. Quality assurance requires sustained monitoring and institutional accountability.

Where permanent academic capacity is inadequate, universities may struggle to maintain these important academic functions consistently.

The result can be an institution that expands enrolment and offers more programmes without developing the academic strength and rigour necessary to sustain quality, reputation, and international rankings.

A university that concentrates on filling lecture timetables while neglecting its permanent academic workforce risks becoming a teaching outlet rather than a genuine centre of scholarship, research and innovation.

A university that relies excessively on part-time lecturers may deliver courses and award degrees, but delivering courses alone is not the same as building a credible, globally competitive, and highly ranked university.

Such a staffing model risks reducing higher education to the delivery of lectures, completion of course requirements, and the awarding of qualifications, rather than fostering deep learning, critical thinking, research, innovation, and professional competence.

It can inadvertently reinforce the **diploma disease,** the pursuit of certificates and degrees at the expense of the knowledge, skills, and competencies those qualifications should represent.

Building a credible university requires a strong, stable, and adequately resourced core of full-time academics who take sustained responsibility for teaching quality, research, student mentorship, postgraduate supervision, curriculum development, and academic standards.

Part-time academics have a valuable role to play, but they should complement rather than substitute for this institutional backbone.

A university must do more than produce graduates with qualifications; it must produce competent professionals, generate knowledge, develop scholars, and cultivate intellectual excellence.

These are the foundations upon which global competitiveness, international recognition, and sustainable academic rankings are built.

Ultimately, the objective of higher education should not simply be to expand access to certificates and degrees, but to ensure that qualifications remain credible indicators of genuine learning, demonstrated competence, and academic achievement.

IS COST REDUCTION TAKING PRECEDENCE OVER ACADEMIC QUALITY?

Universities must manage their finances responsibly. Part-time appointments can provide flexibility, bring specialist expertise into the classroom and connect students with professionals who have current industry experience.

However, financial flexibility must not become an excuse for underinvestment in academic capacity.

Where the overriding objective is to minimise recurrent expenditure by avoiding permanent academic appointments, institutions risk sacrificing long-term academic development for short-term financial convenience.

The consequences may include inadequate research capacity, limited postgraduate supervision, weak academic succession planning, insufficient staff development and reduced institutional continuity.

The central question is therefore not whether part-time lecturers should be employed. They have an important role to play. The question is whether universities are using them to complement a strong permanent academic workforce or to substitute for one.

Cost-saving must never become quality-sacrificing. Universities cannot economise their way into academic excellence by disregarding to employ on full-time basis the rare skills and critical human resources on which excellence depends.

The ultimate risk is that universities may continue to produce graduates without building the intellectual strength, practical competence and research excellence that justify their standing as institutions of higher learning.

THE CONSEQUENCES EXTEND BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

The best economic policy is higher education. The quality of higher education has direct implications for the Grow Zambia Agenda. It has direct implications for students, employers, professional bodies and society.

Students invest time, money and effort in obtaining qualifications that they expect to provide them with the knowledge and competencies required for employment and professional practice.

Employers expect graduates to possess demonstrable skills. Professional bodies expect qualifications to be supported by appropriate academic and practical preparation. Society expects universities to produce competent professionals and fully-baked graduates who can contribute to national development.

Where the implementation of CBC is weakened by inadequate staffing, insufficient practical supervision or unreliable competency assessment, confidence in these expectations may be undermined.

We must not allow the mass production of graduates to take precedence over the production of competent graduates.

A CALL FOR STRONGER ACADEMIC STAFFING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Universities must urgently examine whether their academic staffing arrangements are fit for the demands of competency-based education.

They should maintain sufficient permanent academic staff to provide programme leadership, coordinate curriculum delivery, supervise practical learning, oversee assessment and sustain research and quality assurance.

Part-time lecturers should be strategically engaged to provide specialised knowledge, professional expertise and industry experience. They should also receive appropriate institutional support and be integrated into assessment, curriculum and quality assurance processes.

University management must ensure that all lecturers, irrespective of employment status, have clearly defined responsibilities and adequate time to fulfil them.

The Higher Education Authority, within its regulatory mandate and applicable quality assurance standards, pays particular attention to the adequacy and sustainability of academic staffing when assessing whether institutions possess the capacity to implement competency-based education effectively.

This assessment considers staff qualifications, workload, availability, practical supervision, assessment systems, research capacity and the institution's ability to demonstrate actual student competency.

The objective is not to prohibit part-time academic employment. The objective is to prevent excessive dependence on part-time staff from undermining the quality and sustainability of university education.

CBC REQUIRES A NEW ACADEMIC STAFFING PHILOSOPHY

The transition to competency-based education cannot succeed through curriculum reform alone. It requires a corresponding transformation in how universities recruit, deploy, support and retain their academic staff.

We cannot build a competency-based higher education system on a contact-hour mentality. We cannot claim to develop practical competencies while failing to provide sustained practical supervision.

The message to universities is unequivocal: build the permanent academic capacity required to deliver quality education, and use part-time lecturers to strengthen, not replace, that capacity.

A competency-based curriculum without the permanent academic establishment to implement it is an educational promise without the institutional means to fulfil it.

The consequences of over-dependence on part-time lecturers, particularly where they substitute for a strong and stable permanent academic workforce, will be too ghastly to contemplate.

It is well and good to build a university in order to make money. A university may be run as a business, but it must first be built as an institution of knowledge.

Using part-time academics to build a university to make money cannot be more important than having full-time faculty to build a credible university that produces knowledge and fully baked graduates.

Profitability should never come at the expense of academic integrity, graduate competence, and the long-term credibility of a university.

Using part-time academics primarily as a cost-cutting strategy to maximise profits cannot take precedence over investing in a strong, full-time academic faculty capable of building a credible university that produces knowledge and graduates genuinely equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to excel.

A university is not merely a commercial enterprise that delivers lectures and awards qualifications. It is an intellectual institution with a responsibility to advance

knowledge, foster critical thinking, develop scholars, drive innovation, and produce competent professionals who can contribute meaningfully to society.

Building a university on a foundation of part-time academic staff is synonymous with erecting a house on quicksand. It may appear stable in the short term, but its long-term structural integrity remains fundamentally uncertain.

A credible university requires a solid academic foundation anchored in a committed, stable, and adequately resourced core of full-time faculty who drive knowledge production, mentor students, develop scholars, nurture research, and produce competent graduates.

Part-time academics have a valuable role to play, but they should complement the institution's academic backbone, not replace it.

A university built primarily to minimise staffing costs and maximise revenue may succeed as a business, yet struggle to establish itself as a credible centre of knowledge, research, innovation, and academic excellence.

The true strength of a university lies not merely in its ability to deliver lectures and award degrees, but in its capacity to produce knowledge, develop highly competent graduates, and sustain academic standards that command national and international respect.

You cannot build a world-class university on an unstable academic foundation and expect enduring academic excellence.

Thus, credible and reputable universities invest in recruiting and retaining full-time academics, sometimes from abroad, to strengthen their intellectual capital, research capacity, teaching quality, and international competitiveness.

World-class universities are built by investing in academic talent, not by treating academic staff as a cost to be minimised. International recruitment can strengthen that investment, but it must go hand in hand with developing and retaining local academic talent.

Ultimately, a university's reputation is built on the strength of its full-time faculty, the quality of its research, the competence of its graduates, and its sustained contributions to converting knowledge into goods and services.

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Notes to Editors

About HEA: The Higher Education Authority (HEA) is a statutory body established under the Higher Education Act, 2013. The mandate of the Authority is to regulate and monitor standards in higher education in order to ensure quality and contribute to the enhancement of human capital and national development. HEA commenced operations in 2015.

Information on registered private and recognised public Higher Education Institutions, including accredited learning programmes, is available on the Authority's official website, **www.hea.org.zm**.

The lists of registered Higher Education Institutions and accredited learning programmes are dynamic and are updated as regulatory decisions are made. Journalists and members of the public are encouraged to verify current information directly from **www.hea.org.zm**, by emailing **info@hea.org.zm** or calling (+260) 976 936 658.

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