"Ensuring Quality in Higher Education"

OPENING SPEECH FOR THE 2026 WINTER SCHOOL, LIVINGSTONE

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[salutations]

Good morning colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this Winter School. On behalf of the Higher Education Authority, I extend my sincere appreciation to each one of you for joining us today to reflect on one of the most important pillars of a successful higher

education system—quality assurance in the era of artificial intelligence. In this new era, we would like all of you here to be our point men, and our point women.

We meet at a time when higher education is undergoing unprecedented transformation. Advances in artificial intelligence, digital technology, the growth of online and blended learning, changing labour market demands, internationalization of higher education, and the increasing expectations of students and employers are reshaping the higher education landscape.

These developments present both opportunities and challenges. They also remind us that quality assurance is no longer simply a regulatory requirement for purposes of compliance; it is a strategic tool for institutional excellence, accountability, innovation, and sustainability.

The Higher Education Authority remains committed to ensuring that higher education institutions in Zambia provide quality education that meets national and international standards. Through inspections, audits, accreditation, and surveillance activities, the Authority seeks to protect students, uphold public confidence, and support institutions in their pursuit of continuous improvement.

The findings from inspections conducted during the second quarter of 2026 provide valuable lessons for all stakeholders. While we observed encouraging examples of progress and institutional commitment, we also identified recurring challenges that require urgent attention.

Among the issues noted were delays in the payment of statutory obligations such as annual institutional audit fees and student levies; the offering of learning programmes that had not yet been accredited or were due for reaccreditation; inadequate learning resources such as library books, computers, and teaching facilities; and weaknesses in institutional governance, including failure to notify the Authority of significant changes in management, premises, and affiliations.

Ladies and gentlemen, the proliferation of fake professors remains a serious blight on our system of higher education. The emergence of fake professors is a growing threat we must all confront. Fake professors are individuals who parade themselves as distinguished scholars without having earned the qualifications, research record, academic standing, or peer recognition required for such a title.

Fake professors wear academic robes they have not earned, claim expertise they do not possess, and seek prestige through deception rather than scholarship. Their actions are not harmless exaggerations; they are a direct assault on the credibility of our universities, the dignity of genuine academics, and the trust that society places in higher education institutions.

Let us call this problem by its proper name. Those who deliberately misrepresent themselves as professors are academic criminals. They commit intellectual fraud. They deceive students, parents, employers, institutions, government agencies, and the public.

In some cases, they occupy positions of influence, supervise students, publish questionable work, and provide expert opinions on matters affecting national development, all under false credentials.

Such conduct is unethical, dishonest, and unacceptable. It undermines academic standards, contaminates the knowledge ecosystem, and diminishes the value of qualifications earned through years of sacrifice, rigorous research, and scholarly excellence.

If we allow academic impostors to flourish, we risk creating a culture in which titles matter more than substance and deception is rewarded over merit. The consequences are grave. Students may be taught by unqualified individuals. Research quality may deteriorate.

Institutional reputations may be damaged. International partners may lose confidence in our higher education system. Ultimately, society pays the price when decisions are influenced by individuals whose expertise is built on falsehoods rather than genuine scholarship.

As regulators, academics, and citizens, we have a duty to defend the sanctity of the professoriate. We must expose academic fraud wherever it exists, strengthen the verification of academic credentials, and hold offenders accountable.

The title of Professor is not a decoration to be worn at will; it is the highest academic rank, earned through years of scholarship, research, teaching, and service.

Those who falsely claim it are not merely breaking professional norms—they are attacking the very foundation of academic integrity. We must therefore send a clear and uncompromising message: there is no place for fake professors in our universities, and there will be no tolerance for academic fraud.

We remain concerned about institutions that continue to operate without meeting minimum quality standards. In some cases, we find institutions operating from unapproved facilities, offering unaccredited programmes, or failing to provide adequate learning environments for students. Such practices undermine the integrity of higher education and place students at risk.

During the second quarter of 2026, the Authority's surveillance activities also uncovered institutions operating outside the legal framework governing higher education. Some were offering learning programmes without registration or accreditation, while others were providing qualifications in sensitive professional fields without regulatory approval.

Appropriate enforcement measures were taken, including directives to cease operations and warnings of prosecution. These actions underscore a simple but important principle: quality assurance begins with strict adherence to the law.

Some higher education institutions demonstrated positive growth through infrastructure expansion, increased student enrolment, strengthened leadership structures, and the introduction of scholarship programmes to improve access to higher education. We commend these institutions for their efforts and encourage others to emulate such good practices.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Quality assurance is not the responsibility of regulators alone. It is a shared responsibility that requires the commitment of governing councils, management teams, academic staff, students, professional bodies, employers, and government. Building a culture of quality requires institutions to move beyond compliance and embrace continuous improvement in every aspect of their operations.

As we gather at this Winter School, I encourage us to engage in meaningful dialogue on how we can strengthen internal quality assurance systems, improve governance, promote innovation, enhance student support services, embrace digital transformation, and ensure that our programmes remain relevant to the needs of society and the economy. To each one of you seated here today, your contributions to quality assurance in the era of AI remain singular.

The ultimate purpose of quality assurance is to serve our students. Every policy we formulate, every audit we conduct, every accreditation decision we make, and every improvement initiative we implement should contribute to providing students with a high-quality educational experience that equips them with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to succeed in the twenty-first century.

I am confident that the discussions and recommendations emerging from this Winter School will help shape a stronger, more resilient, and more competitive higher education sector for Zambia.

With these remarks, I wish you fruitful deliberations and a successful Winter School. Thank you for your attention, and may God bless you all.