

'Strengthen NAB to preserve quality university education,

Story: Samuel Doe Ablordeppey

THE Managing Partner of Oxford and Beaumont Solicitors, a corporate law firm, has urged the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports to strengthen the National Accreditation Board (NAB) to a much higher standard to enable it to preserve and restore the quality of university education in the country.

According to Mr Elikem Nutifafa Kuenyehia, the NAB represented a quality assurance body for tertiary education in the country which could play a leading role in ensuring that students who passed out of tertiary institutions understood what they studied and were of the best quality.

Mr Kuenyehia, who is also a lecturer in entrepreneurship, said quality assurance was an important prerequisite for entering the job market.

He was speaking in a follow-up interview after a speech he delivered on 'Winning the War for Talent', at a recent job fair organised by the University of Ghana (UG) Counselling and Placement Centre, in collaboration with the University of East London (UEL).

He has been able to confirm from experience, the much talked about gulf existing between the quality of today's university education and what the job market actually required.

"Anecdotal evidence suggests a negative correlation between number and quality - as the number of university graduates has increased, the quality of education has reduced drastically," he said and added that the country's target of achieving a middle-income status by 2015 would not be met if we do not as a matter of urgency address the issue.

Welcoming the setting up of a Visitation Panel at the University of Ghana, the second ever in the university's 60-year history, which is to review the academic programmes and determine their quality and relevance to the university's mission, Mr Kuenyehia suggested that the panel be specifically asked to make practical suggestions on how to develop crucial, critical

and analytical skills.

The managing partner at Oxford and Beaumont also asked job recruiters to break from the traditional mould of recruitment by focusing less on technical skills, as they might be more perceived than actual, and prioritising students' interest and passion for a particular career or industry over specific degrees and grades.

"There can be no doubt about a graduate's ability to succeed if he has real interest and an employer who invests in his development," Mr Kuenyehia intimated.

He also admonished job recruiters to look out for students with good leadership skills or abilities and those who participate actively in co-curricula events and not those who did their entire course from the library and came out with glorified grades.

"The nerdy candidate with his first class, who spent all the time in the library indicates to me (in the absence of other evidence) that he may not get along as well in the work place and may not be able to balance competing priorities successfully," he said.

Students should also "pursue careers you can be passionate about. You can excel only if you do something you are passionate about and in an industry that you can get excited about," he advised the students.

The Executive Secretary of the NAB, Mr Kwame Dartey, said although the board was expected to ensure quality, its role was limited to ensuring that institutions had the right baseline infrastructure and human capacity, which entailed the right calibre of teaching and administrative staff for the programmes being offered.

He said the tertiary institutions themselves were supposed to have quality assurance units to ensure that their products were good standard and quality.

"It is for the universities themselves to put much emphasis on their quality assurance to ensure that the products yield the needed quality requirement of the job market, Mr Dartey said.

This means that NAB, therefore, could not be directly held responsible for the inability of products from tertiary institutions to perform satisfactorily on the job.

To a suggestion that the NAB could be

given an additional role for a post-qualification evaluation, the NAB Executive Secretary said the board was already involved in conducting pilot tracer studies of polytechnic students. When successful, it would be extended to other tertiary institutions, such as the universities.

The programme is being run in collaboration with NUFFIC, the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education, the National Council for Tertiary Education and the national board responsible for technical and professional education.

A tracer study targets scholars who complete a programme or award and traces where they are living and working. The study is used to assess the success and achievements of a programme and comes out with ways of improving and making it relevant to the times.

An officer at the JobBank, Mr Kenneth Hammond-Aryee, said projects such as career services centre for students held the answer for improving on the quality of products from the country's universities.

The JobBank is a project under the University of Ghana (UG) Counselling and Placement Centre, being run in collaboration with the University of East London (UEL) to provide a linkage between graduates of the university, employers and lecturers.

Mr Hammond-Aryee said now, employers complained a lot about the quality of products, as most of the graduates do not have an incline of what pertained on the job market and required a lot of coaching on the job.

He said he believed that a lot of emphasis needed to be placed on setting benchmarks and standards, saying "we should look at key success factors in the market, what the job market wants and tailor the products to meet them".

For example, he said, depending on a career, an employer may look at classroom grades while some would go beyond that to look for other employability traits and factors.