



# National Open University of Nigeria

Policy Title	Policy on Incubation Centre
Policy No:	NQSA/POL/COM/001
Owner:	National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
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## 1.0 Introduction

The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) established the Centre for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS) on May 11, 2017 which became Directorate for Entrepreneurship and General Studies in May 21, 2019. DE&GS's mission is to instill lifelong learning skills and foster entrepreneurship, addressing unemployment and empowering students. It operates seven incubation centre strategically located across the nation's six geopolitical zones—Maiduguri, Bogoro, Kano, Abuja, Enugu, Uyo, and Lagos. This policy document outlines DE&GS's vision, mission, objectives, and key principles. NOUN incubation system educates and mentors student entrepreneurs through DE&GS, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for sustainable development by 2030 and beyond.

### 1.1 Vision and Mission:

**Vision:** To be regarded as the foremost entrepreneurship and general study centre anchored by the university to provide sustainable entrepreneurial skills and general knowledge through a comprehensive reach that exceeds all barriers.

**Mission:** To provide functional cost-effective flexible learning that adds lifelong value to students' entrepreneurial initiative, creativity, research, and innovation.

### 1.2 Objectives

The core objectives of the incubation centre of the Directorate for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS) at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is to instill lifelong learning skills and foster entrepreneurship among students, aligning with the institution's commitment to addressing unemployment and empowering individuals. incubation centre at NOUN will:

- i. Identify students with creative and innovative start-up ideas.
- ii. Cultivate proper value orientation for personal and societal well-being.

- iii. Prepare students for post-university life, fostering job creation and entrepreneurial skills.
- iv. Promote an entrepreneurial culture among NOUN students.

### **1.3 Core Values:**

DE&GS has two main functions – to build soft skills in students through exposure to general courses and to prepare them to be self-reliant. The focus is on entrepreneurship and general studies. Therefore, the goals are to produce graduates with value addition over and above their field of study for self-reliance and well-rounded, morally and intellectually capable graduates with vision and entrepreneurial skills.

### **1.4 Motto:**

Explore, Develop, Deliver.

### **1.5 Journey:**

The Directorate of Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS) commenced its journey on May 11, 2017, initially known as the Centre for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (CE&GS). In response to its evolving role and activities, the University Management later renamed it as the Directorate for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS) on May 21, 2019.

Primarily, DE&GS serves NOUN students, imparting them with essential lifelong skills and employability prospects. It also extends its services to the broader community, offering training, consultancy, and research support.

Recognizing the challenges surrounding unemployment and the sustainability of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the face of government efforts to promote entrepreneurship, NOUN conducted research within the MSME sector. The findings revealed that the absence of entrepreneurship education and mentorship hindered many MSMEs from breaking even.

NOUN observed a prevailing focus on vocational training in universities, which often overshadowed entrepreneurship education and innovation. To address this, NOUN endeavors to shift the narrative from vocational training to entrepreneurship education that nurtures creativity and innovation.

Additionally, NOUN seeks to address the apathy among undergraduate students toward general entrepreneurship studies, reorienting them to recognize the value of entrepreneurship in their academic pursuits. An important facet that NOUN is determined to address is the neglect of social entrepreneurship empowerment. NOUN's mission is to structure the entrepreneurship process to support the national mandate.

In 2019, NOUN initiated a structure that brings together faculties, industries, and the government to cultivate young entrepreneurs. NOUN's entrepreneurship programme prepares student entrepreneurs by providing them with entrepreneurship education and mentorship through the DE&GS, with a strong focus on contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

## 2.0 Purpose

The purpose of DE&GS is to:

- i. Foster entrepreneurship education and cultivate an entrepreneurial culture among NOUN students.
- ii. Provide students with the expertise and capabilities necessary to excel as entrepreneurs, fostering job creation and economic advancement.
- iii. Promote the creation of incubation centres and mentorship initiatives to assist budding entrepreneurs.
- iv. Equip students to navigate the complexities of the contemporary business environment, emphasizing self-sufficiency and economic resilience.

## 3.0 Scope

The Directorate for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS) at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) plays a pivotal role in the institution's mission to equip students with lifelong learning skills and foster entrepreneurship. The DE&GS operates akin to a robust business incubator, offering a wide-ranging scope of support. This encompasses the provision of state-of-the-art physical workspaces, expert mentoring, tailored coaching, and a comprehensive suite of educational programs.

Emphasizing the power of networking, DE&GS acts as a bridge, connecting students with seasoned mentors and potential investors. Additionally, it actively assists in securing funding, granting access to vital infrastructure and resources, and providing guidance on legal and administrative matters. The scope of DE&GS can be customized based on specific industries or geographic locations, all with the overarching goal of accelerating entrepreneurial growth, enriching entrepreneurial skill sets, and preparing students for successful ventures while nurturing a dynamic, collaborative, and innovative ecosystem.

## 4.0 Definitions

**4.1 Lifelong learning:** Continuous and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge, skills, and personal or professional development throughout one's entire life.

**4.2 Entrepreneur:** An individual who initiates and manages a novel business endeavour with the goal of generating a profit.

- 4.3 **Entrepreneurship Education:** Learning that imparts essential knowledge, skills, and mindset to identify, create, manage, and expand new business ventures.
- 4.4 **Mentorship:** Professional partnership where a mentor provides guidance, support, and counsel to a less experienced mentee.
- 4.5 **Incubatee:** Individual or startup receiving nurturing, mentoring, and support within an incubator or incubation programme.
- 4.6 **Incubation Centre:** Facility or place designed to offer assistance, resources, and support for early-stage startups and entrepreneurs.
- 4.7 **Start-up:** A start-up denotes a recently founded enterprise or business that is usually in its initial phases of establishment and expansion. Startups are distinguishable by their innovative and entrepreneurial essence, as they bring novel offerings, services, or business concepts to the marketplace.
- 4.8 **Creativity:** Ability to generate original, novel, and valuable ideas, solutions, or expressions.
- 4.9 **Innovation:** The process of introducing new, improved, or significantly different products, services, processes, or ideas into a market or society.

## 5.0 Principles

- 5.1 NOUN is committed to entrepreneurship education for the undergraduate students.
- 5.2 NOUN is committed to harmonious living and teaching its students same.
- 5.3 The General Study Courses are structured in line with the NUC benchmark.

## 6.0 Policy Statements

- 6.1 DE&GS shall provide guidance to faculties on GST courses.
- 6.2 NOUN Incubation centres will:
  - 6.2.1 adopt a startup-centric approach, where policies prioritize the needs and success of startups in all decision-making and activities.
  - 6.2.2 promote inclusivity, welcoming diverse startups from various industries, backgrounds, and developmental stages.
  - 6.2.3 mentor and guide incubatee, ensuring experienced mentors are readily available to provide valuable support.

- 6.2.4 guarantee resource accessibility, offering startups essential resources, such as office space, equipment, and technology.
- 6.2.5 foster a collaborative environment through networking opportunities, organizing events, workshops, and networking sessions.
- 6.2.6 ensure sustainability by maintaining core principle, promoting environmentally friendly practices and encouraging startups to consider sustainability in their business models.
- 6.2.7 remain open to evolving and adjusting policies to meet changing startup needs and the evolving business environment.
- 6.2.8 be committed to equity and inclusiveness, creating a fair and inclusive environment that provides equal opportunities to startups of all backgrounds. Transparency will be maintained in the selection, evaluation, and support of startups.
- 6.2.9 guarantee the implementation of well-defined policies aimed at enabling an organized exit strategy, aiding startups in managing transitions that could encompass acquisition, merger, or the process of going public.
- 6.2.10 implement feedback mechanisms, allowing startups to provide input on the support and services they receive.
- 6.2.11 collaborate with the broader business ecosystem, including other organizations and universities, will provide startups with a wide range of opportunities.
- 6.2.12 focus on the long-term growth and sustainability of startups, not just short-term success.
- 6.2.13 offer guidance and access to funding sources, including venture capitalists, angel investors, and government grants.

## 7.0 Policy Implementation

- 7.1 **Preamble:** Incubation Centre of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is dedicated to implementing its comprehensive policy of equipping students with entrepreneurial skills and nurture a culture of innovation within the university community. This implementation policy aims to articulate a methodical approach for the effective execution of entrepreneurship and general studies initiatives within the Directorate for Entrepreneurship and General Studies (DE&GS). It is set to highlight phased deployment, encompassing incubation centres, a comprehensive entrepreneurship curriculum, ICT integration, collaborations, and mentorship programmes. The policy intends to give precedence to continuous monitoring, flexible learning platforms, community engagement, and a periodic policy review mechanism. It will underscore the significance of communication, optimal resource allocation, training, reporting, and stakeholder engagement. The policy is crafted to evolve dynamically, functioning as a guide for Incubation centres' vision as a catalyst for entrepreneurial development and lifelong learning at the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN).

## **7.2 Student Engagement**

Incubation centres will:

- 7.2.1 provide students with access to essential learning tools, including Moodle, instructional audios and videos, customized tablets, and Braille for visually impaired students.
- 7.2.2 offer both virtual learning (synchronous and asynchronous) and, when applicable, face-to-face learning to facilitate hands-on activities.
- 7.2.3 promote a transformative and participatory leadership style, teamwork, and learner-centred teaching methods.

## **7.3 Teaching and Learning Methods**

7.3.1 Incubation centres will employ various teaching and learning methods, including:

- 7.3.1.1 Cooperative Learning: Students collaborate in groups, enhancing critical thinking and teamwork, promoting an active, supportive learning environment.
- 7.3.1.2 Experiential Methods: Learning through hands-on experiences fosters practical knowledge and problem-solving skills, emphasizing real-world application.
- 7.3.1.3 Case Study and Problem-Solving: Analyzing real-life scenarios promotes critical thinking and decision-making skills, applying knowledge to practical issues.
- 7.3.1.4 Innovative Teaching Environments: Creative, technology-driven approaches, like flipped classrooms and online learning, engage students in adaptable, personalized learning experiences.

## **7.4 Entrepreneurship Incubation Centres**

Incubation centres will

- 7.4.1 establish both resident and non-resident incubation centres to support startups.
- 7.4.2 provide mentorship and follow-up services.
- 7.4.3 encourage research and support startup initiatives.
- 7.4.4 organize and facilitate events to foster entrepreneurship and innovation.
- 7.4.5 conduct an annual event to promote innovative ideas and educate students. This will include a competition called "Brave Idea."
- 7.4.6 collaborate with various organizations, including NOUN, TETFUND, UNIDO, SMEDAN, CBN, NBTI, SON, NAFDAC, AYE, IITA, Eupepsia

Place Ltd (sFarm Lab), and others to promote entrepreneurship education.

7.4.7 commitment to implementing a robust entrepreneurship education programme at NOUN. It will be subject to regular reviews and improvements to adapt to changing entrepreneurial needs and educational best practices, ensuring the ongoing success of the programme.

## **7.5 Incubation Centres Structure and Timelines**

### **7.5.1 Incubation Centre Locations**

- NOUN operates seven incubation centres across Nigeria: Bogoro, Maiduguri, Kano, Abuja, Enugu, Uyo, and Lagos.

### **7.5.2 Resident and Non-Resident Incubation**

- Resident: Students have working spaces within the centres under university guidance.
- Non-Resident: Students operate outside NOUN but receive equal guidance and equipment access.

### **7.5.3 Admission**

- Admission is available to students who have demonstrated creativity and innovation either during their GST302 presentation or as recognized by faculties through their research projects.

### **7.5.4 Incubation Period**

- Duration: 1 - 3 years, beginning at 400 level.
- Enables a strong startup foundation for graduates.
- Varied graduation times based on innovation, launched with startups.

### **7.5.5 Post-Incubation Period**

- Lasts one year for stability assessment before final release.
- Coordinators follow up on graduate progress.

## **7.6 Incubation Centre Activities**

**7.6.1 The NOUN Incubation Centre will provide education to incubatees on various entrepreneurship topics in accordance with a structured topic:**

1. Registration and Documentation of Incubatees
2. Development of Innovative Idea
3. Market Research

4. Business Management Process
5. Human Relations
6. Marketing Strategy
7. Financial Literacy
8. Business Communication
9. Record Keeping
10. E-Business and Digital Marketing
11. Business Sustainability
12. Writing Business Plan/Proposal for Sponsorship
13. Statutory Agencies in Business and Business Registration

### 7.6.2 Facilitation

At the start of each month, students will engage in guided virtual learning sessions. On the final Monday of every month, students will have a two-hour interaction with a facilitator, either virtually or in person, from 3 to 5 pm.

### 7.6.3 Innovation Challenge (IC):

Incubation centre will organise and oversee the Innovation Challenge, which is designed as follows:

#### **General Eligibility Criteria and Requirements:**

1. Open to all enrolled NOUN students and its Alumni.
2. Encourage innovative ideas that may or may not be related to students' coursework.
3. Support individual participants or groups of up to five individuals.
4. Target specific societal issues with innovative solutions, considering novelty and significant improvements.

#### **Application and Assessment Process:**

1. Issue a call for proposals at the end of February each year.
2. Require interested students, student groups, and Alumni to pitch their innovative ideas or business concepts before a panel of experts, with pitching sessions conducted online.
3. Utilize the following assessment criteria for pitching sessions (scored out of 100%):
  - Problem definition (20%)
  - Innovativeness of the proposed solution (50%)
  - Feasibility of the proposed solution (20%)
  - Potential impact of the proposed solutions (10%)
4. Conduct a second phase of virtual training for shortlisted participants, focusing on Business Model Canvas.
5. Assess shortlisted ideas/concepts based on the following criteria (scored out of 100%):
  - Problem definition (5%)
  - Innovation (25%)
  - Capabilities (15%)
  - Sustainability (10%)



- Potential impact (10%)
- Feasibility (15%)
- Customer/user definition (15%)
- Quality of the Submission (5%)

DE&GS's IC aims to nurture innovative thinking and problem-solving among NOUN students and Alumni by providing a platform for proposing novel solutions to societal challenges. It serves as an avenue for creative and practical problem-solving within the NOUN community.

#### 7.6.4 **Certificate in Entrepreneurship Education**

The NOUN Incubation Centre will offer a 13-week (3-month) Certificate in Entrepreneurship Education programme, as outlined in our framework, with the aim of equipping students with the knowledge and skills required for the successful initiation and management of a business.

#### 7.6.5 **Standards for Assessment**

DE&GS will implement the following standards for assessment:

- i. Enforce a minimum attendance requirement of 60% to promote active participation and engagement in courses.
- ii. Evaluate students by setting a passing threshold of 50% in oral interviews or practical-oriented fill-in-the-blank questions, assessing their ability to apply acquired knowledge effectively.
- iii. Encourage students to create business plans and canvases as practical exercises, assessing their capacity to transform theoretical knowledge into actionable and viable plans for entrepreneurship.

## 8.0 **Sanctions on Violating this Policy**

8.1 A student who violates the policy may lose all benefits he/she would have enjoyed from the university.

8.2 Any staff that violates this policy may receive written warning, denial of three months' salary, suspension from duty that may last one year, being release from holding administrative position as may be decided by the University Management.

## 9.0 **Policy Alignment**

9.1 NOUN Open, Distance and eLearning Policy.

9.2 <https://deags.nou.edu.ng/ceags/degs-framework/>

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