



National Open University of Nigeria

Policy Title	Policy on NOUN Regional Operations
Policy No:	NQSA/POL/CPL/001
Owner:	National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)
Approved By:	The University Senate
Manager/Driver:	Directorate of Advancement and Linkages (DAL)
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1.0 Introduction

Partnership and Linkages is an integral part of NOUN. As the largest open, distance and eLearning university in Nigeria and the West African sub-region, NOUN is committed to playing a leading role in the higher education sector for the development of digital capacity and deployment of robust IT infrastructure and ICT services through the growth in network of partners in Nigeria and the West African sub-region. It has also built a network of relationships which enhances the fulfilment of its threefold core mandate of teaching, research, and community service.

NOUN Vision

To be regarded as the foremost university providing highly accessible and enhanced quality education anchored by social justice, equity, equality, and national cohesion through a comprehensive reach that transcends all barriers.

Mission

The enhancement of functional, cost-effective, flexible learning which enhances lifelong value to quality education for all who seek knowledge.

NOUN Core Values

The operation in NOUN is characterised by innovation in teaching and learning, research and scholarship, community engagement, partnerships, and collaboration. Collaboration is the main activity towards the building of cross-border relationships and enhancement of support mechanisms. This is in response to changing labour market needs, and underpinned by principles of lifelong learning, flexibility, and learner-centredness.

NOUN mantra is to enhance access to higher education and contribute to the development growth in network of partners in Nigeria and the West African sub-region through the growth in network of partners in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

This is achieved through:

1. Equity and Equality

A need to ensure that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities for all and therefore maintain an open-door admission policy and flexible delivery of instruction. We strive to ensure as much as possible that the institution achieves equality in the facilities and services to facilitate and support learning in all locations, communities, and for all individuals.

2. Accessibility

A commitment to ensuring access to education for all segments, communities, and individuals in the sub-region and equipping them with skills to improve their circumstances. Through this, disadvantaged and marginalised populations, including persons with special needs have open access to university education.

3. Learner-centred support and engagement

The institution operates a learner-driven and student-centred approach mode of instructional delivery through the affordances of technological facilities to support self-learning. There is the deployment of extensive learner support services towards alleviating the isolation experienced by learners.

4. Flexibility

A commitment to flexible approaches to instructional delivery and study while offering the opportunity to learn at a distance using blended learning modes appropriate to the learning situation, content, and context. Creating flexible routes through provision of access programmes to enhance academic readiness for degree programmes.

5. Partnership

The promotion of collaboration and partnership with regional institutions, organisations, and agencies to foster teamwork, sharing of ideas and resources, and develop professionalism.

6. Human Capacity Development

We recognise that well-trained, motivated, and committed staff are our key assets and are therefore committed to their continuous professional development.

7. Multi-Modal Instructional Delivery System

The adoption of a multi-modal instructional system, which considers the limitations of local environments and utilises a variety of media and technologies such as print, audio-visual, radio, television, and Internet (web-based instruction).

8. Enhanced Quality

The goal is to achieve and maintain excellence through the appropriate use of technology to support and improve the quality of learning experience. This is enhanced

through commitment to continuous improvement of programmes of study, teaching, learning and research.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure a systematic access to tertiary education with a focused goal to increase student enrolment and the development of digital capacity for technological advancement in the West African sub-region. This is to be achieved through the:

- i) facilitation of effective deployment of digital technology through the strengthening of institutional capacity in the following key areas: digital capacity for teaching and learning as well as digital infrastructure and networking capacity.
- ii) Sourcing collaboration and cooperation in areas such as academic linkages, staff and student exchange, research and sharing of computing infrastructure.
- iii) organising regional capacity-building workshops on online and blended learning.
- iv) development of digital skills among students and professionals through short term courses and training programmes.

3.0 Scope

The key areas of focus for the regional operations are to align with its identity and mandate. Through the deployment of digital capacity and collaborations with other institutions in the sub-region; capacity building for faculty in digital education, digital skills for students, and institutional impact.

The NOUN vision is to enhance partnerships with Higher Institutions in the Sub-Region which entails joint research collaborations, staff sabbatical placements; library development; understudying the scope and operations of student counselling activities.

The strategic priorities include:

- championing the power of higher education to improve lives.
- supporting the long-term vitality of higher institutions in the West African Sub Region.
- partnering with higher institutions across borders and promoting collaboration among them.
- Enhancing educational opportunities that make a positive and lasting difference.
- Upholding the NOUN reputation for excellence and demonstrate its impact.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 Linkages:

An agreement between NOUN and academic bodies/institutions that is of mutual benefits to both parties. Such benefits that contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities at both institutions while maintaining and respecting the sovereignty and autonomy of both.

4.2 Sub-Regional Linkages:

An inter-institutional agreement with institutions or agencies in the West African Sub-Region which involves the commitment of institutional academic resources in collaborative research, joint academic and scholarly activities, exchange of publications, student and/or staff exchange programmes, and collaborative degree programmes.

4.3 Informal Linkage:

A collegial relationship among academic staff members, administrators, and/or students in the sub-region which does not involve commitment of institutional resources.

4.4 Institutional Resources:

Human and financial resources in NOUN or partners. This includes courses, academic programmes, degrees, diplomas, reports, and findings on research conducted.

4.5 Reciprocal Exchange:

Activities based on operations or activities where in the maximum number of staff/students involved annually is specified and commits either party to reciprocity in the arrangement over a specified period.

4.6 Validity period:

This is the duration of a linkage agreement.

4.7 Research Scholar:

An affiliate from a partner institution visiting primarily for the purpose of conducting academic research, observing, or consulting in an area which involves academic research projects.

4.8 Short-Term Operation:

An activity or event scheduled for the purposes of conducting other related activities not specified in the agreement.

4.9 Letters of Intent (LOI):

Written statements of goodwill between the NOUN and another institution, government or a non-profit organization in the sub-region which expresses mutual interest from both parties to form a partnership with the objective of generating a reciprocal benefit. LOI does not involve a commitment of university resources.

4.10 Contract:

A letter of intent in which the provisions are binding upon the parties involved. An approved templates for contracts shall be always adopted.

4.11 Cooperation Agreement:

This means a written agreement between the university and another institution, government, or non-profit institution that supports student and /or school exchanges, research collaborations, or multi-institutional degree programmes. A cooperation contract may entail a commitment of one or more university resources for academic and research purposes and should be approved by the Vice-Chancellor. Cooperation contracts also include “Memoranda of Understanding” (MOU), and “Letter of Intent” (LOI) which are written statements of goodwill between the university and another institution, government or a non-profit organization expressing a mutual interest from both parties to form a partnership with objective of generating a reciprocal benefit.

4.12 Proponent:

The NOUN administrative unit(s) proposing the linkage.

4.13 Responsible Office:

The Vice-Chancellor and Registrar will serve as the responsible officers for sub-regional linkages and collaborations on behalf of the university.

5.0 Principles

5.1 NOUN recognises the impact of regional collaborations in the advancement of university education and development of nations. Therefore, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) would take step to reach beyond its national borders in a more focused, systematic, and extensive way. The university will be committed to strengthening its position as the leading provider of flexible and quality education through open, distance, and eLearning in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

5.2 NOUN will take action to enhance the development of Action Plans in areas that are core to the NOUN mandate: deployment of digital capacity in the sub-region, collaboration with other institutions in the sub-region; capacity building for faculty in digital education, digital skills for students, and institutional regional impact. These areas of focus shall serve as the basis to drive the strategic plan, towards the fulfilment of its core operations of teaching, research and serving communities, beyond physical location.

6.0 Policy Statements

6.1 This policy shall focus on increasing the visibility of NOUN in the following areas:

- a. Improved academic operations: Identifying innovative ideas and expansion of inclusive global education opportunities through exposures to experiences of other institutions/ organisations for the support and success of academic programmes.
 - b. Expansion: Increasing derivable knowledge through intentional, collaborative efforts, including the development of non-degree certification pipeline programmes.
 - c. Visibility: Guiding the development of agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), engagement with academics, the conduct of research and connections towards the enhancement of NOUN network in the sub-region.
 - d. Scholarship: enhancing the NOUN visibility and support for sub-regional empirical learning and research.
 - e. Advancement: Improving the operations in sub-region, through the cultivation of regional academic networks, and corporate support for the conduct of research and philanthropic giving.
 - f. Reputation: Enhancing a global recognition of NOUN as an ODeL institution through rankings, branding, communications, leadership and expertise.
- 6.2 The deployment and delivery of digital capabilities within the sub-region shall be hinged on robust IT infrastructure. Through the operations of Africa Centre of Excellence on Technology Enhanced Learning (ACETEL), a critical pool of faculty and technical support staff equipped with requisite techno-pedagogical skills would develop strategies for collaborations towards facilitating the deployment of digital capacity in the sub-region.
- 6.3 Through formal collaborations and linkages, regional students will be enrolled in programmes offered in the Africa Centre of Excellence on Technology Enhanced Learning (ACETEL). The enrolment of regional students in short courses can be enhanced. The networks of Regional Training and Research Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL) and ACETEL, shall be adopted to extend to more countries in the sub-region.
- 6.4 The Institutional Leads will oversee its implementation of the policy guidelines through a university constituted Regional Strategy Committee. The committee shall be constituted to review all collaborations and linkage proposals, ensure an appropriate level of expertise and comprehensive review of each proposal, and make recommendations based on the:
- a. reputation and class of potential institutional partners.
 - b. general scope and specific areas of the proposed linkage.
 - c. resources and strengths of the prospective partners, and extent to which they reinforce or compliment NOUN resources and strengths.
 - d. potential benefits for both parties.

- e. partners' responsibilities, potential liabilities arising from the activities proposed, the financial arrangement, and any services to be provided.
- f. evidence that the relevant unit and partner institution can support their commitments under the contract; and
- g. time frame of the proposed cooperation including terms of renewal and termination.

7.0 Policy Implementation

- 7.1 Collaborations and linkages must be proposed by an initiator through the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages as specified below:
 - 7.1.1 Internal Initiator(s)
When proposed by faculty members or senior staff of academic/administrative units:
 - 7.1.2 External Initiator(s)
When proposed by an institution or a representative of an external academic unit, research group or an academic/ non-teaching member of staff. Agreements initiated by affiliates of NOUN should be supported with the completion of the form on an approved template through which the specified details of the institution involved and its approving officer would be provided.
- 7.2 Proposals are to be driven by senior teaching or non- teaching members of staff of the university. If the proposal is at the behest of the Vice - Chancellor, either of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors or Director, Advancement and Linkages must act as the driver.
- 7.3 Where the driver is a staff other than the Dean or Director, it is essential to first discuss the need for a collaborative agreement with the Unit Administrator (Dean or Director) to ensure that the required resources are available to support the partnership.
- 7.4 The driver must complete an approved General Agreement Proposal Form which is sought and obtained from Directorate of Advancement and Linkages (DA&L).
- 7.5 The General Agreement Proposal Forms are to be accompanied with letters of support from the relevant Deans or Directors or Registrar (if from a senior non-teaching staff) and forwarded through the DA&L for necessary approval and processing.
- 7.6 Prior to the submission of a proposal for review and approval, the driver of the proposal must provide the following information:
 - a. a letter which specifies the goals of the proposed agreement and anticipated next steps.

- b. background, history, and information on prior contract with the institution/organization.
 - c. derivable benefits from the agreement.
 - d. primary contact(s) for the implementation and submission of annual reports of activities resulting from the agreement.
 - e. confirmation of the language to adopt in the agreement.
 - f. mode of formalising the agreement: in person or electronically; and
 - g. the support of faculty member or senior staff of academic /administrative units of the proposed agreement (denoted by their signature).
- 7.7 Approval of agreements establishing any academic linkage as well as any required Supplementary Agreements tailored to the specific proposal would be formally processed, through the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages, to the collaborating partner for concurrence or otherwise and returned for further processing.
- 7.8 The Directorate of Advancement and Linkages (DA&L) is authorised to negotiate drafts of agreements for contracts at partner institutions. However, this process will be conducted in consultation with the corresponding units at the university and the senior administrative officers such as (e.g., Deans, Directors, Director of Media, and the Registrar, etc.)
- 7.9 The proposals are forwarded to the administrator in the implementing unit for further deliberation and recommendation.
- 7.10 The DA&L will develop and forward a brief on the submissions made to the Vice-Chancellor for the necessary approval.
- 7.11 Based on the approval granted, at least two signatories for each party; one representing each institution/organization are required to formalise the agreement.
- 7.12 The Directorate of Advancement and Linkages will be responsible for the maintenance of an updated database of all agreements which must be presented for annual reviews by a statutory committee charged with that responsibility.
- 7.13 The submission of proposal forms would not be required for the establishment of Supplementary Agreements with partners with whom NOUN has a General Agreement.
- 7.14 An agreement may be formalised electronically or in-person. In the case of both options:
- either party may first sign at least two copies of the document and forward send both copies for completion, by the other. One fully signed and dated copy is retained by each institution/organization.

- A signing ceremony which involves the heads of both institutions or their designated officers in person can be arranged in advance. The agreement's sponsors are expected to take the lead in designing the visit while working with the Vice-Chancellor's office to arrange for participation of senior university leadership.
- 7.15 Annually, at specific period as agreed by both parties the sponsor through the Administrative Head shall forward a brief report which summarizes the activities for the previous year and plans of the next to the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages. Proposal to renew or terminate an agreement must be reported and discussions on the issue be initiated in the annual report.
- 7.16 No cooperation or contract may be promised until the full review process has been completed and the necessary approval is in place.
- 7.17 The implementation of this policy will be monitored to ensure that the stated action plans, activities, and intended objectives are achieved. A monitoring and evaluation schedule will be developed to guide the implementation. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets for each activity and timelines to achieve them will be set.
- 7.18 The renewal, termination and amendment of collaboration shall be guided by:
- a. linkages with partner institutions, including all amendments that may result after the initial formalisation process, remain in effect for the period stated in the contract.
 - b. the effectiveness of all contracts and annual review based on the recommendation of the proponents and drivers of the linkage in consultation with the unit concerned.
 - c. agreements classified as inactive or problematic may be terminated upon six months' written notice, unless otherwise stipulated in the contract.
 - d. duration, at least nine months prior to the expiration of the agreement, implementation authority shall undertake a formal review of the contract and forward recommendations on whether or not it should be renewed, and if so, whether changes should be made, to the Vice-Chancellor, no less than six months prior to the expiration date.
 - e. duration, six months prior to the expiration of the agreement, the implementation authority shall undertake a formal review and make recommendations towards its renewal through the Directorate of Advancement and Linkages.

8.0 Sanctions on Violating this Policy

- 8.1 Violation of this policy by either party shall lead to termination of the collaboration and each party shall bear their financial commitments.
- 8.2 Where a staff thwarts the implementation process, such staff shall be disciplined by the university.

9.0 Policy Alignment

This policy aligns with:

- 9.1 NOUN Open, Distance and eLearning Policy.
- 9.2 National Open University of Nigeria: National Open University (No. 6, 1983) CAP N63.
- 9.3 National Open University of Nigeria: National Open University (Amendment Act, No. 19, 2018).
- 9.4 National Open University of Nigeria Academic Brief (2023)

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