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FLEXIBLE LEARNING POLICY

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Signature by Chairman Council

A handwritten signature in blue ink is written over a horizontal line.

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1.0 Interpretation of Operational Terms of the Policy

- (i) Flexible: one sense of the word "flexible" is yielding to pressure. Flexibility in education is not always a virtue. Increased flexibility brings with it the need to pay particularly close attention to the objective of maintaining and, where possible, elevating academic standards.
- (ii) Flexible Learning: is an approach in education which offers the student choice on what to learn, how it is learned and assessed and when and where learning happens. It also refers to both an educational philosophy and a set of techniques for flexible delivery, access and communication. The centrality of the engaged student in this model challenges the lecture approach, where students are relegated to a passive role, as the dominant method of teaching in higher education. It also provides an alternative approach to the traditional master apprentice model of research supervision. Hence, it emphasizes education that suits students' needs and interests, thereby providing the potential to focus the learning experience towards the development of an enthusiasm for participation in a learning community and lifelong learning. These outcomes are possible when the students become skilled in autonomous learning, and learn to construct their own knowledge through interaction with peers, academic staff and others.

1.1 Background of MRU

Muteesa I Royal University (MRU) was offered an operational license by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) in 2005 and started its operations in 2007. The founding Chancellor of the University, who is also its Visitor, is His Majesty the Kabaka, Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II. The genesis of modern education in Uganda is historically associated with the Kingdom of Buganda owing to the role that Sekabaka Muteesa I played in inviting the missionaries who introduced education in Uganda. Owing to this history, it is only befitting that the University was named after this visionary leader. Hence, the University was named after the 31st King of Buganda who was a monarch of great vision, Kabaka Muteesa I (1856-1884). MRU is a skills training, academic and research-oriented institution of higher learning that was established as a private institution. The initiative was promoted by the Executive Committee (EC) of the Buganda Kingdom, headed by the *Katikkiro* (i.e., Prime Minister).

1.2 Strategic Goals of MRU

The Strategic Goals of MRU are as follows:

- i. To produce graduates with all-round competencies and skills to be able to initiate self-employment activities or compete for jobs in the global market;
- ii. To promote research and encourage students and staff to publish;
- iii. To build and expand collaboration and engagement with the community, the alumni, and industry and business, and to equip students with practical skills while empowering the community, industry & business to develop local solutions;
- iv. To strengthen MRU's human resource capacity;
- v. To achieve a sustainable financial resource base;
- vi. To improve the administrative and organizational arrangements of MRU with a view to achieving efficiency and effectiveness in all sections of MRU; and

- vii. To construct or acquire, rehabilitate and maintain buildings, equipment, implements, ICT facilities and land particularly for the growth and development of its niche.

1.3 Vision of MRU

The Vision of MRU is to be “a leading university responding to contemporary challenges through teaching and learning, research and technical guidance”.

1.4 Mission of MRU

The Mission of MRU is “to provide training, research and technical guidance responsive to national socio-economic needs”.

1.5 Core Values of MRU

The core values of MRU are as follows:

- i. Professionalism; Professionalism is a trait that's highly valued in the human resource of any organization. It has many attributes, including: (a) Specialized knowledge, (b) Competency, (c) Honesty and integrity, (d) Respect, (e) Accountability, (f) Self-regulation, and (g) Image.
- ii. Respect for Diversity;
- iii. Cultural Sensitivity;
- iv. Tenacity; and
- v. Team Spirit.

2.0 Introduction of the Policy

This Policy outlines MRU's approach to managing flexible learning provision. Flexible learning offers personalized, convenient, and affordable way for adults and other non-traditional students to learn and earn a MRU qualification while balancing work, family, and other commitments. It also provides a framework for flexible learning, within which MRU can define, describe, plan, resource, implement, monitor and evaluate the range of flexible learning activities it offers its students. The Policy recognises that MRU demonstrates extensive flexibility in the design and delivery of its curriculum with large variations between fields of study in some dimensions of flexible learning. The Policy reflects MRU's mission and strategic priorities, particularly in respect of promoting social inclusion and increasing participation in and progression to higher education. The Policy aims to broaden the learning opportunities available to students by widening the settings and formats of learning associated with traditional modes of study.

3.0 Objectives of the Policy

This Policy is designed to:

- i. Establish a shared understanding of flexible learning in the context of MRU;
- ii. Articulate a framework within which the domains of flexibility can be developed and managed within resource constraints, together with related policies; and
- iii. Establish quality assurance structures and accountabilities in relation to flexible learning activities across the domains of flexibility.

- Hence, Flexible Learning enables learners to:

a) Learners earn credit for what they know:

Learners may draw upon their existing knowledge to complete assessments and make progress towards their MRU qualification. It does not matter where the learner gained his/her knowledge - from prior Courses, work experience, military training, or other learning experiences. At MRU, if the learner knows it and can show it, he/she can use it to earn credit;

b) Learners advancing at their own pace:

Through MRU's flexible learning, a learner can progress towards his/her desired qualification based on assessments of key competencies determined by MRU. Learners take assessments whenever they are ready. For instance, they can pass one level and move on to the next.

c) Learners receive personalized support:

A dedicated Academic Success Coach will work with a learner to create a learning plan and a timeline tailored to fit the learners' goals and knowledge. The Coach will help the learners to prepare for assessments and pointing out learning resources needed to succeed.

d) Start when you want:

The learners' starting time and progress is not limited by a traditional semester based schedule. Learners can start on any time of the year and can take breaks in between subscription periods if and when they need to.

e) Learning skills that improve employability and job creation:

By passing assessments of critical competencies, learners prove mastery of the skills and knowledge that are important for employability and job creation.

4.0 Application of the Policy

This Policy shall be applicable to all persons charged with offering students the necessary choice and techniques to learn flexibly at MRU.

5.0 Scope of Flexible Learning

5.1 The following are indicative of flexible learning provision:

- a) The provision of bespoke or tailored Courses for particular employers or sectors;
- b) The development of small unit credit-based learning opportunities;
- c) The accreditation of prior experiential/certified learning;
- d) The recognition of in-house training by allocation of MRU credit;
- e) Learning situated in a workplace or based around a work situation;

- f) The development of individually negotiated learning contracts for individual learners and cohorts; and
- g) The provision of distance delivery courses.

5.2 Such provision may also feature:

- a) The involvement of employers in the design and delivery of Courses;
- b) The use of the workplace as a site of learning and assessment;
- c) The involvement of employers in assessment; and
- d) The involvement of private educational providers in the delivery and assessment of learning.

MRU, therefore, encourages and supports the following measures:

- i. Continuing research and development of a range of flexible delivery models;
- ii. Continuing research into student preferences for various flexible delivery models;
- iii. The provision to students of explicit information on the methods of delivery of Credit Units and Courses prior to their enrolment;
- iv. The development of quality standards and procedures for the production and timely delivery to students of flexible learning materials;
- v. The inclusion in Faculty/School/College management and operational plans and MRU's learning, teaching and curriculum plans the strategic development of flexible delivery in identified areas;
- vi. The inclusion in Faculty/School/College budgets of the costs associated with methods of flexible delivery;
- vii. The provision in School Teaching and Learning Management plans for appropriate training for students and staff in technology mediated environments; and
- viii. The development and implementation of academic teaching workload models that reflect the work patterns associated with various flexible delivery models.

6.0 Administrative and Learning Support

MRU shall ensure that its flexible learning activities will be supported by:

- i. Collaborative planning and implementation by administrative and learning support areas of their services to support the flexible learning activities of MRU;
- ii. The availability and accessibility of all administrative and learning support systems and services to ensure maximum 'ease of use' for both staff and students;
- iii. Continuous assessment of the nature of student markets, emerging technologies, administrative systems and pedagogies for flexible learning;
- iv. Support for students to develop academic and study skills, information literacy and skills for learning in technology mediated environments; and
- v. Support for staff to develop information literacy and skills for teaching and learning in technology mediated environments.

7.0 Principles of Flexible Learning

The underlying principles of the Policy require that:

- i. All developments will be subject to MRU's internal quality assurance procedures to ensure that student learning is designed, approved, delivered, assessed, monitored

- and reviewed in line with National Council for Higher Education's (NCHE) expectations;
- ii. An assessment of the potential risks involved in flexible learning provision will be conducted and appropriate processes used to mitigate the risks, proportional to the volume of learning being validated, delivered and awarded;
 - iii. All developments will be linked to an appropriate Faculty/College/School within MRU;
 - iv. All developments will be coordinated by the Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning, which will be established under this Policy; and
 - v. All developments will be approved in accordance with MRU's regulations and procedures before delivery commences.

8.0 Flexible Learning Modes

Increasingly learners might not always be able to study full-time on Campus. Many of such learners might be working or have family commitments, and can't attend regular classes. Some of the learners might want to study a single subject, take classes over the summer holidays, or fast-track attendance of their MRU qualification. Hence, under this Policy MRU shall put in place a number of flexible study options. The flexible approach offers learners a range of study options:

8.1 Part-Time

Studying part-time is a great option for learners already working or having other commitments that take up a lot of their time. Such learners may be able to study 1 or 2 Course Unit(s) in each semester. Their qualification will take them longer to complete, but such learners can learn at their pace that is more suited to their needs and demands. Full-time students, who feel that they can't commit enough time to studying, may change to studying part-time. However, fulltime students need to withdraw before a certain date to ensure that they don't receive an academic or financial penalty.

8.2 Distance Learning

Distance learning also known as external study or open learning means that learners don't have to be on Campus in order to study. A number of the Courses will be offered online, with lecture notes and learning materials available for download.

8.3 Intensive Mode Study

Learning may be facilitated through the intensive mode. The Units are taught over shorter teaching periods, sometimes over five or six weeks, on several consecutive weekends, or intensively over a week. Because intensive mode Units have comparatively fewer classes, attendance is compulsory. Studying in intensive mode allows the learners to complete a Unit in a much shorter time.

8.4 Project-Based Study

Some Courses involve a research project, or a series of smaller projects. Normally part of a postgraduate degree, these project-based units allow learners to complete their Course while working on an individual project, rather than completing Coursework Units. This

can give learners the flexibility to study at a pace that is more suited to their individual needs.

8.5 Individual Course Unit

Learners may be interested in studying a single Course Unit, without enrolling on a full program of study. Such learners may be able to study an individual Course Unit, as visiting or cross-institutional students. Studying can be for professional or personal development, or may even count towards a degree at another institution. Studying as a visiting student is also a way to see if the study suits one's personal needs before committing to a whole degree.

8.6 Learning through Employment

The learning through employment framework allows individuals already in employment to work towards a MRU-level qualification relevant to their specific area of work. Under the learning through employment framework the majority of learning takes place through active and reflective engagement with work activities, underpinned by appropriate academic knowledge and skills. Course Units and programs can be tailored to any subject and are negotiated between the learner, MRU and the employer. The three parties work together to agree on a Course Unit or program of study that draws or builds on the learner's work activities and, at the same time, satisfying the requirements for a MRU qualification at the appropriate level.

The outcomes of the Course planning stage are recorded in a learning contract which, once approved by MRU, serves as a formal academic document akin to a Course Document. The learning contract may incorporate a claim for Credit to be awarded for previous learning where it is relevant to the theme of the overall course. Courses typically involve work-based projects, a research project and a module focussed on reflection on learning in the workplace.

Learners may also incorporate subject-specific modules, accredited in-house Courses and independent study modules within their individual Courses. This would be agreed at the Course planning stage. Outline modules, including sample learning outcomes, will be developed by the Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning in order that Course designers who may be less familiar with a competency-based approach to assessment or with the practice of accrediting informal learning, may take these 'off the shelf' modules and incorporate them into their Courses. The Centre for Flexible and Distance Learning will also produce 'toolkits' for learners, Lecturers and employers and a Curriculum Design Guide.

9.0 Quality Assurance of Flexible Learning

MRU must maintain an overview of the academic standards and quality of all flexible learning provisions to ensure the quality, consistency and fitness for the purpose of the product and to facilitate the development of appropriate systems to cater for this type of provision.

All flexible learning provisions will be required to go through regular academic development approval processes and will be evaluated and approved through existing validation structures.

10.0 Flexible Learning Awards

MRU will introduce a range of new 'short' qualifications designed to meet increasing demand for Courses that are smaller in Credit terms than the traditional range of Courses. This enables MRU to provide accredited Courses and recognised qualifications that meet a wider range of learning needs, such as continuing professional development, professional/skills updating and work-based learning. Modules at any level and at different levels may contribute to a MRU Certificate of Credit.

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