



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

**STATEMENT ON CONFERMENT AND USE OF HONORARY DOCTORATE
DEGREES AND HONORARY PROFESSORSHIPS IN MALAWI**

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1.0 Introduction

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (hereinafter ‘the Council’) is mandated by the NCHE Act No. 15 of 2011 to regulate higher education in Malawi.

The Council has noted with concern the manner in which individuals are conferred with honorary degrees by both local and foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) or entities, as well as how the recipients of such awards use their titles. The Council has further noted, that most awardees of honorary doctorate degrees use the title “Doctor” (abbreviated as “Dr.”) while awardees of honorary professorship use the title “Professor” (abbreviated as “Prof.”). It is against this background that the Council wishes to state its position regarding the conferment and use of honorary doctorate degrees and honorary professorships in Malawi.

2.0 Earned Doctorate Degree and Honorary Doctorate Degree

There are two types of doctorate degrees: Earned and Honorary.

2.1 Earned Doctorate

Earned doctorate degree means a doctorate degree that is awarded based on academic work evaluated and accepted by qualified faculty in the context of a specific degree programme. All earned doctorate degrees are academic qualifications while honorary doctorate degrees are not. An academic qualification within the context of higher education is an award granted for successful completion of a programme of study and is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved pre-determined learning outcomes to pre-determined standards.

2.2 Honorary Doctorate Degree

An honorary doctorate degree, in Latin *honoris causa* (“for the sake of the honour”) or *ad honorem* (“to the honour”), is conferred as a way of honouring individuals for their outstanding contribution to a specific field or society in general and not earned through academic achievements. Honorary doctorate degrees do not require a programme of study with defined learning outcomes or set standards. In the absence of clearly defined learning outcomes, approved learning programme and set assessment protocols for issuance of honorary doctorate degrees, such degrees cannot be designated as qualifications but as honours. Honorary degrees

are ceremonial awards and are conferred after assessing the impact and significance of the contributions an individual has made in various spheres of life.

3.0 Processes and Procedures for Awarding Honorary Doctorate Degrees

The Council hereby presents guidelines for HEIs on processes and procedures when conferring honorary doctorate degrees:

- a) HEI shall have laid down policies, processes and procedures for awarding honorary doctorate degrees.
- b) HEI shall ensure that the process for nominations, review, selection and notification of candidates are transparent.
- c) An honorary doctorate degree shall not be conferred in consideration of the payment of money or the giving of property of whatsoever kind.
- d) An honorary doctorate degree shall be conferred by the HEI's Council/Board on recommendation by Senate.
- e) An honorary doctorate degree shall be conferred during a HEI Convocation.
- f) HEI may confer an honorary doctorate degree posthumously, provided that the process commenced while the recipient was still alive.
- g) An honorary doctorate degree shall not be conferred on anyone who holds a teaching, research or administrative post within the HEI.
- h) HEI shall not confer an honorary doctorate degree if it has not graduated anyone with a doctorate degree from its programmes.
- i) An honorary doctorate degree can be withdrawn or revoked by an awarding institution if, in the considered view of the institution, the awardee's character and standing in society bring the name of the institution into disrepute.
- j) The terms of reference (ToRs) for those conferred honorary doctorate degrees should be made known to the recipients.

4.0 Use of Honorary Doctorate Degrees in Malawi

The Council hereby presents the guidelines for HEIs and recipients on the use of honorary doctorate degrees in Malawi:

- a) Honorary doctorate degrees shall be conferred upon individuals as special recognition and should not be construed as academic qualifications.

- b) For anyone awarded with an honorary doctorate, the recipient of the award should not address himself/herself as ‘Doctor’. However, such honours can be placed on the resume under “achievements and awards” section.
- c) Members of the academia and the public including the media are not to address a recipient of an honorary doctorate orally or in writing as ‘Doctor’.
- d) The guidelines on the use of honorary degrees outlined from 4(a) to 4(c) shall also apply to honorary degrees awarded by foreign institutions within and outside of Malawi.

5.0 Academic Professorship and Honorary Professorship

There are two types of professorships: Academic professorship and honorary professorship.

5.1 Academic Professorship

The Council acknowledges that the term ‘professor’ is ‘a slippery term’. The usage of the term ‘Professor’ in most of European and African countries means something quite different from what it denotes in North America. In North America, ‘professor’ and ‘professorship’ are generic labels applied to *all* academics employed to teach and research in universities. In Europe, Africa and Australasia, ‘professorship’ denotes distinction: a professor is someone who has been promoted to the highest academic rank—usually on the basis of her or his scholarly achievements. It is the equivalent to what, in North America, is known as *full* professorship.

Generally, within the higher education sub-sector, a ‘Professor’ is defined as a lecturer of the highest academic rank in a department of a HEI. Thus, the title of Professor should be conferred on an individual by the HEI when that individual meets the institution’s set criteria for the rank and after undergoing a rigorous assessment process both at the institution where they work and other academic institutions of similar standards. It means that an academic promoted to the rank of Professor must be someone who has demonstrated evidence of exceptional scholarship, leadership, teaching and must have comprehensive knowledge in their field of specialization.

Regarding promotion of staff to professorship, the Council expects the following:

- a) That every HEI should have an approved Staff Promotions policy, and that deserving academic and non-academic staff at the institution are promoted based on the set criteria in the policy.
- b) That every HEI should perform professorial inaugural ceremonies after its Council has promoted the concerned academic member to the rank of Professor.

- c) That the conduct of professorial inaugural ceremonies and other academic events should be governed by the HEI's Constitution and/or Statutes.
- d) That Professorship is not a qualification but an appointment based on one's contributions to the specified discipline of study.

5.2 Honorary Professorship

The title of honorary professor is a title conferred upon an individual in recognition of a person's special contribution to the subject areas associated with the faculty's academic activities. Honorary professors are not HEI staff nor employees. The Council is, nevertheless, aware that some HEIs, particularly those in the East, confer honorary professorships. ***In Malawi, no HEI shall confer an honorary professorship. Additionally, honorary professorships shall not be used in Malawi.***

6.0 Conclusion

The Council recognises the importance that earned and honorary awards play in higher education. The Council expects that all honorary doctorate degrees will be conferred by the HEI's Council/Board on recommendation by Senate. The Council also expects that all HEIs shall have policies, procedures and processes for awarding honorary doctorate degrees. It is also important that such processes and procedures are transparent to all stakeholders. It is also important to note that, in Malawi, no HEI shall confer an honorary professorship. Additionally, honorary professorship shall not be used in Malawi. The Council expects that all HEIs and recipients of honorary doctorate degrees will adhere to the guidelines provided in the Statement. The Council shall monitor compliance of the guidelines through assessments for registration and accreditation of institutions and programmes, quality audits and spot-checks. The Council reserves the right to revoke accreditation and/or registration of any HEI not complying with the guidelines in the Statement. Furthermore, the Council shall publish any HEI and recipient of such awards that do not comply with the guidelines in the Statement. The Council appeals to all stakeholders, including the civil society organisations and members of the general public to join hands in promoting ethical and legitimate practices in higher education. Let us work together to protect the integrity and dignity of Malawi's higher education.