

**STRENGTHENING OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY OF DEANS,
DIRECTORS AND DESKS OFFICERS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION WITH
CAREER SERVICE CENTRE OF USMANU DANFODIYO UNIVERSITY SOKOTO**

BY

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Introduction

The expansion and increase in the number of tertiary institutions have resulted in a drastic rise in the number of students graduating from tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, graduate employability remains a well-known challenge, with many graduates struggling to secure employment. A survey tracking Nigerian university graduates (10,000 participants) revealed that less than 12% of Nigerian university graduates secured decent jobs within 18 months of graduation, while over 60% could not find jobs after graduation (Babalola, 2016, cited in Ogunode, 2025).

Graduate employability challenges in Nigeria, according to Ogunode (2025), can be attributed largely to the mismatch between labour market demands and higher education curricula. This underscores the need to align what universities teach with societal and labour market needs, as aptly captured by Garcia and Miralles (2017), who note that “your purpose lies at the intersection of what you love, what you are good at and what the world needs.”

It is against the background of graduate employability challenges in Nigeria, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) introduced Career Service Centres (CSCs) in 2024 across tertiary institutions to complement other programmes within the Nigerian tertiary education system. These centres provide students with information on labour market trends, employment opportunities and required skills, as well as linkages with employers and industries, including internship opportunities (FUNAAB, 2024).

The Usmanu Danfodiyo University Career Service Centre is part of the various centres established across Nigerian tertiary institutions and is expected to play a vital role in ensuring that graduates are academically sound, employable and socially responsive. To achieve this mandate, effective collaboration with faculties and directorates is crucial. Deans, Directors and designated Desk Officers serve as

major institutional links between the Career Service Centre and academic units. Strengthening their operational and administrative capacity is therefore essential for achieving the objectives of the Centre.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of operational capacity, administrative capacity and Career Service Centre are clarified below.

Operational Capacity

Operational capacity refers to the ability of an organization or its personnel to effectively carry out core activities required to achieve stated objectives. In higher education institutions, McKinsey & Company (2017) noted that operational capacity encompasses planning, coordination, service delivery, monitoring and adaptation to changing institutional and environmental demands. Within university centres, operational capacity involves the ability of staff to organize career fairs, manage employer relations, provide career counselling, coordinate internships and track graduate outcomes.

Administrative Capacity

Administrative capacity refers to the institutional and human capabilities required to manage policies, procedures, resources and systems that support organizational functioning. Aina (2014) stated that administrative capacity includes skills in human resource management, record keeping, financial administration, compliance, communication and workflow coordination.

In Nigerian universities, administrative capacity is particularly significant due to complex regulatory frameworks, expanding institutional size and increasing accountability demands from government and accreditation bodies (Ogunode & Musa, 2021).

Career Service Centre

The concept of Career Service Centre has been defined by scholars. Agunude (2024) defines a Career Service Centre as a dedicated university department that provides support, guidance and resources for students and alumni on career development, skill building and job search efforts.

Based on this definition, a Career Service Centre can be seen as a unit designed to empower students and alumni with relevant skills, knowledge and opportunities, enabling them to thrive in the labour market. By doing so, these centres serve as a vital link between universities and employers, addressing labour market gaps in Nigeria and beyond.

TETFund Career Service Centres

Despite the establishment of Career Counselling Units in Nigerian tertiary institutions and secondary schools, graduates continue to struggle with career decisions, leading to persistent employability challenges.

To address this situation, TETFund launched Career Service Centres in 2024, encouraging public tertiary institutions benefiting from TETFund funding to establish units known as Career Service Centres. The objective is to empower students and bridge the gap between academia and the labour market. Accordingly, TETFund Career Service Centres are specialized units established in Nigerian public universities, polytechnics and colleges of education to enhance graduate employability through career counselling, résumé development, industry-based training, mentorship and job placement support.

Career Service Centre of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

The Career Service Centre of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, was established following a 2023 directive from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) mandating tertiary institutions to set up Career Service Centres. The Centre was initially placed under the administrative supervision of the Centre for

Entrepreneurship Services. On 2nd August 2025, a substantive Director was appointed to head the Centre.

To ensure effective functioning, two existing staff of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Development were co-opted into the Career Service Centre as Career Counsellor and Head of the Career Resource Centre. In addition, representatives from all faculties were appointed as Faculty Career Counselling Desk Officers to decentralize services and provide faculty-specific career guidance.

Objectives of the UDUS Career Service Centre

The objectives of the UDUS Career Service Centre are derived from TETFund's overarching goal of establishing Career Service Centres in Nigerian universities. This goal is to provide students with information on labour market trends, employment opportunities and requisite skills, while facilitating linkages with industries and alumni. In line with this mandate, the objectives of the UDUS Career Service Centre, as contained in its establishment plan (2024), include the following:

- i. Provide professional career counselling and mentoring services
- ii. Offer access to career information, digital tools and job search resources
- iii. Bridge the gap between academia and industry through employer engagement
- iv. Coordinate internship, volunteering and job placement opportunities
- v. Complement entrepreneurship training with career preparedness programmes
- vi. Equip students with employability and soft skills

Functions of the UDUS Career Service Centre

Based on the stated objectives, the Centre is expected to perform the following functions:

1. Provide information on career paths, job prospects and employer events.
2. Utilize the Centre's portal and e-library to facilitate enrolment in online career-related certification courses.
3. Schedule one-on-one career coaching sessions.
4. Prepare students for career-focused e-learning pathways.
5. Assist students in securing internships, work-study placements, volunteering opportunities and employment.

Roles of Deans, Directors and Desk Officers for Effective Collaboration

The primary beneficiaries of the Career Service Centre are students drawn from various faculties and directorates of the University. Faculties and directorates are headed by Deans and Directors, who are represented in the Career Service Centre by designated Desk Officers.

Under this arrangement, the success and progress of the Career Service Centre depend largely on effective collaboration among these stakeholders. It is therefore imperative to strengthen their operational and administrative capacity by clearly defining expectations and responsibilities, as this will significantly contribute to the success of the Centre.

Deans of Faculties and Directors of Academic Centres

A Dean is the head of a faculty or college within a university, responsible for overseeing academic and administrative affairs, providing leadership and ensuring alignment with the university's mission.

A Director is a senior administrative officer responsible for overseeing the operations, programmes and services of a specific directorate, providing strategic leadership and ensuring alignment with institutional goals.

To ensure effective collaboration between faculties, directorates and the UDUS Career Service Centre, Deans and Directors are expected to:

- i. Provide overall leadership and policy direction for faculty engagement with the Career Service Centre.
- ii. Ensure that career development is mainstreamed into faculty activities.
- iii. Facilitate staff and students participation in Career Service Centre programmes.
- iv. Support data sharing and reporting requirements.
- v. Align faculty-specific programmes with Career Service Centre objectives.
- vi. Designate and supervise Desk Officers.
- vii. Facilitate collaboration between academic centres and the Career Service Centre.
- viii. Promote career readiness initiatives relevant to their specialized mandates.

Desk Officers from Faculties and Directorates of Academic Centres

A Desk Officer is a staff member appointed by Deans and Directors to serve as a liaison between faculties or directorates and the Career Service Centre. Accordingly, Desk Officers are expected to:

- i. Serve as the primary liaison between the faculty/directorate and the Career Service Centre.
- ii. Coordinate Career Service Centre activities within their faculties or directorates.
- iii. Mobilize students for career programmes and opportunities.
- iv. Maintain accurate records and submit regular report.
- v. Provide feedback on student career needs and outcomes.

Career Service Centres in Some Universities in Nigeria

The establishment of Career Service Centres across Nigerian universities aims to enhance graduate employability. Several universities have existing career support structures and have implemented diverse programmes to prepare students for the labour market. Selected examples include:

Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife

OAU's Career Service Centre is widely regarded as one of the most institutionalized among federal universities (Pulse Nigeria, 2025). Its activities include career fairs, structured internships, mock interviews, assessment centre simulations and mentoring. These efforts have resulted in higher student participation, strong employer confidence and the integration of career services into student life beyond final year.

University of Lagos (UNILAG)

According to Famuyiwa (2025), UNILAG's Career Service Centre benefits from its location within a commercial hub, enabling strong industry partnerships. Activities include career camps, employability master classes, internship placements, professional certification programmes and entrepreneurship support, leading to improved graduate visibility and alignment with industry needs.

University of Ilorin

The University of Ilorin Career Service Centre enjoys strong leadership support, enabling capacity building for career staff and liaison officers. Activities include training workshops, global career readiness programmes and emphasis on ethics and professionalism. Outcomes include improved coordination, a growing culture of career planning and internal staff development.

University of Ibadan

The University of Ibadan Career Service Centre leverages the institution's academic tradition and alumni network through career talks, alumni mentorship,

postgraduate guidance and research career linkages, resulting in a strong mentoring culture and extended career support beyond graduation.

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

The ABU Zaria Career Service Centre works closely with SIWES and industrial training units, offering career seminars, employer engagement sessions and industrial attachment support. Achievements include improved career awareness, coordination mechanisms and a foundation for expanded impact through stronger faculty collaboration.

Conclusion

The paper examined strategies for strengthening the operational and administrative capacity of stakeholders to ensure effective collaboration in the management of the UDUS Career Service Centre. The effectiveness of the Centre largely depends on strong collaboration with Deans, Directors and Desk Officers, supported by leadership commitment, clear coordination mechanisms and capacity enhancement. These elements are essential for integrating career development into the University's core activities and improving graduate employability.

Implications of Practices in Other Universities for UDUS Career Service Centre

Based on experiences from other Nigerian universities, the following lessons are relevant for UDUS:

- i. Strong leadership support, as seen at OAU, enhances centre effectiveness.
- ii. Industry and alumni partnerships, exemplified by UNILAG, can be adapted locally.
- iii. Staff capacity development, as practiced at the University of Ilorin, improves coordination.

iv. Alumni mentorship models from the University of Ibadan can strengthen guidance efforts.

v. ABU Zaria's experience highlights the importance of sustained faculty collaboration.

Given the unique context of each institution, UDUS should assess its specific needs and tailor Career Service Centre programmes accordingly.

Suggestions

Based on the issues raised in the paper, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. Career development should be embedded within academic activities by the University management to ensure sustained collaboration between faculties and the Career Service Centre.
2. UDUS Career Service Centre should provide targeted capacity-building for Deans, Directors and Desk Officers to strengthen their operational and administrative effectiveness.
3. Faculties and Directorates as well as the Career Service Centre should ensure clear communication channels to reduce duplication of career service efforts.
4. UDUS Career Service Centre should develop standardized data management and reporting systems for tracking outcomes and supporting evidence-based planning.
5. The Center should ensure strategic engagement with industries and alumni to improve students' access to mentorship, internships and employment opportunities.
6. The centre should maintain continuous professional development of its staff and Desk Officers to update their career counseling skills
7. UDUS Career Service Centre should adapt best practices of Career Service Centres from other universities

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