Introduction
The theme or title of this conference allows for a wide latitude of interpretations as to the intended objectives. But, perhaps, a common purpose seems to run through, namely that leadership and governance of higher education in the countries of the continent require overhaul to achieve the desired goals of higher education. Opinion is bound to differ about what aspects of higher education leadership and management need transforming and this is perhaps why the convenors of this conference identified a variety of themes for exposition. Yet the imperfections in African higher education leadership and management that the conference theme implies will require both time and patient boldness to resolve; and any solution proposed may be unnerving, especially to some of those with vested interests in the status quo. And yet, the pivotal role that higher education is expected to play in African development should compel the reluctant analyst to shackle trepidation and hold the bull by the horn.

It is in the latter spirit that this paper takes as its concern the issue of search for and recruitment of senior university managers in the African context. The paper draws primarily, but not wholly, from the Kenyan experience because of the writers' greater familiarity with practices in this context.

The Ideological and Historical Background
References to the existence of the university as an institution in the ancient African kingdoms of Mali (at Timbuktu and Jenne) notwithstanding, (Songa, 1971, p.5), contemporary African states inherited the university institution from colonial European powers. In effect, the university in Africa had its roots, including its ideology and intellectual ethos, in the academic traditions of Medieval Europe.
In the 12th century private academic guilds emerged in Europe and their focus was to protect academic freedom of universities from both the Church and the state. By academic freedom the guilds meant their own control of curriculum, appointment of personnel and promotion or demotion of such personnel. Later this protection was
also extended to other interest groups outside the university (Husen and Postlethwaite, 1994).

There is evidence that over time, this freedom and the autonomy it implied was eroded as the nation state became stronger in Europe. For instance, by the 16th and 17th centuries, university academic guilds in Paris, France and Bologna, Italy, came under tighter-state control (Smyth, 1978,). The Paris and Bologna cases became the model of university-state relations for continental Europe especially in those countries under strong Catholic influence. Under this kind of arrangement, professors became more or less civil servants (Smyth, *ibid.*).

The governance and operational model in Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England was different from that adopted in Continental Europe. The academic guilds (called *studia*) enjoyed more autonomy and the Chancellors of both institutions enjoyed greater freedom of action (Smyth, *ibid.*). The university authorities in England consequently perceived the university institution as an independent corporate entity and students as members rather than customers or clients of this corporation. The result was, and has continued to be, a strong student representation in governance organs of the universities.

Yet not all Protestant countries adopted the British model. To the contrary, the Parisian-Bologna external control model was applied, admittedly in modified forms. Whatever the case, the upshot was the institutionalisation of a governance model in which the primary jurisdiction of the university was under external non-academic boards. Surprisingly, there are some universities in the U.S.A that operate on this model.

The point to note immediately here is that in Anglophone African countries during colonial rule when universities were introduced, the Oxbridge and Cambrian governance models were in vogue. For most of these university colleges, the favoured parent institution was the University of London. The university colleges in the British colonies enjoyed considerable autonomy from political authorities in the colonies, such control being vested in the governance organs of the metropolitan institution. Merit selection standards and procedures of the metropolitan university were applied, *mutatis mutandis*, in the affiliated colonial university college.
One is not arguing that colonial university colleges in British dependencies were absolutely free from political control. The point being emphasized is that such political control as may have existed was subtle and remote. As a matter of fact, universities and colleges, even under liberal democratic regimes, have not been completely free from state control. As one informed scholar in this area of discourse observes:

Universities and colleges are also public bodies that, although they have certain autonomy for the control and direction of their own internal life, are not entirely self-regulatory. They are public agencies chartered by the state through legislative enactments. Such public enactments embody the collective views of the public with respect to colleges and universities. (Smyth, 1978: p. 1859).

In other words, academic freedom is a relative concept in the sense that it falls within a continuum of greater freedom of action on the one hand and much more restricted freedom of action on the other hand. It is not a matter of absolute freedom or total servitude. The degree of control, particularly state control, seems to increase in proportion to the level of dependency the particular institution of higher education has on the state or the benefactor (Altbach, 1991).

The Experience Of African Universities

As pointed out earlier, the university colleges bequeathed to post colonial African countries valued the ideological tenets of autonomy and academic freedom (Perkins, 1978). On attainment of political independence from colonial authorities, the new African elites felt compelled to redefine the role and vision of universities. While some measure of autonomy and freedom was to be tolerated, the major thrust of the African university was to be service to the new nation and accountability to the taxpayers (Yusufu, 1973).

On record, many African universities have enjoyed some appreciable degree of autonomy in the area of student admissions, academic staff recruitment and promotion, and choice of academic curriculum and research agenda. These freedoms are enshrined in the Acts of many of these universities (Sifuna, 1998, p. 190). The area in which direct government control of public universities is felt is in the appointment of senior university managers.
These key officers include the Chancellor, members of the University Council, the Vice-chancellor, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor(s), Registrar(s) or Chief Academic Officer(s) and their equivalents. In this regard, the Kenyan experience, while not necessarily typical, is quite illustrative.

Since the attainment of political independence in Kenya in December 1963, the Acts of the public universities stipulate that the President of the country shall be the Chancellor. There is a very interesting qualification to this stipulation that reads thus:

The President shall, unless he sees fit to appoint some other person thereto, be the Chancellor of the University.

And

A person once appointed by the President to be the Chancellor shall hold office for such period as the President shall determine, but that person shall cease to hold office if the election of a President results in a change of the holder of the office of the President.

These stipulations that place firm control of the titular head of the Kenyan public universities in the person of the President, have not been tested since in fact the two post-colonial Presidents have personally been the Chancellors of public universities. Nonetheless, the specified stipulations give room for entertaining the view that the President of the Republic does not have to be the Chancellor of any or of all public universities. We shall return to this point later.

The other point is that the Chancellor determines the choice of key members of University Councils, particularly the Council Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Treasurer (Kenyatta University Act, 1985, Article 12 la). The Chancellor’s powers also extend to the selection of the Vice-Chancellor. In this last case, he is supposed to consult with the Council before declaring his choice (University of Nairobi Act, 1985). This process of consultation is not clearly specified and may be open to manipulation.
Although the appointment of Deputy Vice-Chancellors rests with the Council of each public university, the Chancellor has again to be consulted before such an appointment is made. In other words, the Chancellor's influence extends to the determination of persons to serve as Deputy Vice-Chancellors. Pretty much the same procedure governs the choice of persons to serve as Principals of colleges within those public universities that have these bodies.

University Registrars (and their equivalent) are appointed by University Councils. In some of the public universities persons are appointed to these positions on promotion from senior administrative ranks; in this case, one expects merit to prevail in such promotions. In recent times a practice has emerged in some public universities to appoint Registrars from among academic staff. Since the positions are neither advertised nor subjected to competitive interviewing, the selection of the incumbents for such positions is mainly done by senior university managers. This practice gives rise to speculation and suspicions regarding the criteria use in the appointments.

Selection of Senior University Managers, Autonomy and The Merit Principle.

It is expected, of course, that the senior university managers appointed in African universities will serve the national interest. I believe it is this consideration that explains the reservation of nearly all these positions for citizens of the specified countries.

The above-mentioned expectation notwithstanding, the political appointment of senior university managers is contestable on at least three grounds. First, it violates the merit principle that is a cherished ideology of the university as an institution of higher learning. Closely related to this violation of the merit principle is the view that political appointment of key university officers goes against the spirit of openness and rules of fair play that the university strives to uphold in appointments and promotions into academic and lower level administrative grades. Seen in this perspective, the non-merit, non-open appointment of senior university managers is an anomalous practice within the university system.

There is a second bone of contention. Those appointed to senior university leadership-cum-management positions exercise considerable power and authority in decision-making regarding critical aspects of the university's operations. Such decisions
impinge directly on the welfare of all constituencies within the university, from academic staff to students and their parents, from administrative staff to unionisable ancillary workers. It can be quite discomforting when large segments of the university community have played little or no role in the selection of the wielders of decisive power and authority in their institution. Political or restricted non-merit appointment of these senior managers thus smacks of leadership by imposition, which again is an anomalous practice in an institution suffused with democratic ethics such as the university.

The third obviously contentious issue emanating from ‘clientelist’ recruitment of senior university leaders and managers is linked to the perks (salaries and benefits) attached to such offices. While the terms of service for senior university managers vary in detail from one university institution to another, the salaries paid are normally higher than those of professional academic grades; the positions also usually attract access to free transport, duty (free) houses, one or two house helps and security personnel as well as relatively high allowances of various types. For some persons to be elevated to positions that carry the mentioned privileges largely by accident, luck or correct political connections, flies in the face of fair play and transparency.

It needs to be noted very carefully that in raising the three issues above, one is not denying that in a good number of instances senior university managers who have been politically appointed have performed their roles commendably. The point in dispute essentially is the way they secure the opportunity to serve over their usually more qualified peers and colleagues. To reiterate, the current recruitment practices violate the internal autonomy of the university to hire and fire its staff and the academic freedom of the institution to select the most qualified, experienced and meritorious candidate for its key leadership positions.

Reconceptualising Recruitment Of Senior Managers Of African Universities
A number of scholars on the issue of recruitment of senior university managers have proposed a more open, albeit democratic, process of doing so in place of the current method of political or personalised appointments (Coombe, 1991; Kwapong, 1992; Emonyonu, 1990; Sifuna, 1998). Two alternative approaches to recruit senior university managers have been proposed in the literature on this subject in respect to Africa. The first is that such officers should be elected by the entire membership of
the university community (Sifuna, 1998,). The second method proposes the election of such officers by respective university senates from among senior academic and administrative staff (Sifuna, *ibid.*).

The proposal for the popular election of senior managers sounds compelling. The risk though is that elections are not necessarily the most efficient means of recruiting people with talent for leadership positions. Populism is not necessarily synonymous with effectiveness. One is reminded, for example, of a situation in the early 1990's when a scholar of the rank of tutorial fellow was elected Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Nairobi. Elections can at times result in the absurd.

There is a second problem in respect of proposals to popularly elect senior university managers, even by such a select body as the university senate. In many African countries, including Kenya, ‘politicised ethnicity’ is everywhere in evidence. In this situation the high stakes involved in senior management positions may result in largely ethnic voting and less deserving candidates who are nonetheless able to mobilize bloc voting are likely to secure recruitment. This is what has on occasions happened in the election of Deans of Faculty. It is the view here, therefore, that popular elections are not a suitable strategy for recruiting talent and competence to senior management positions in African universities.

There has been another proposal regarding the recruitment of senior university managers. The proposal has been that the Council in consultation with the Senate of the specific university should shortlist three candidates for any one post. These three names, complete with a brief on each candidate should then be forwarded to the Chancellor of the university for him/her to appoint one for the position in question.

For slightly lower level positions, such as those of Registrars, Finance Officers and Librarians, the Council can appoint one candidate from a list of three placed before it by the Senate. All the three shortlisted candidates should have the qualifications and qualities demanded by the office for which they are being considered.

While this approach to recruitment of senior managers for the university has much to commend it, it still poses a number of problems. First, while the position to be
filled is known, it may not always be the case that the qualities and competencies required are clear to Council and Senate members involved in shortlisting of candidates. Second, it is possible that some prospective candidates can covertly influence opinion so that populism and not merit come to bear on the outcome. Third, at the critical moment of selecting a specific candidate for office, the whims of one person (e.g. the Chancellor), or a clique, can prevail in the selection. This can result in the weakest of the three candidates being recruited into office.

In view of the perceived limitations of the foregoing three strategies of recruiting senior university managers, a fourth alternative that is more efficacious is proposed. This alternative is selection though an open advertisement and interviewing process, much as is done for academic and some administrative positions. This strategy for Kenyan public universities is strongly recommended because requisite conditions exist for its adoption.

Towards a New Recruitment Strategy for Senior University Managers
The wave towards democratising governance institutions at the national level that has been sweeping across Africa since the early 1990s, has direct implications for the management of public universities. Universities have a high concentration of well-educated persons who are conscious of their individual rights and responsibilities and who cherish democratic values and practices. Many of them value the opportunity to participate in decision-making on issues that affect the management of their universities.

Following the repeal of Section 2(a) of the Kenyan Constitution in 1991, there has occurred greater liberalisation of political thought and widened space for freedom of conscience, expression and association. In the public universities, the result has been increasing questioning of the place of political appointments of senior university managers. In Kenya, such thinking has been given impetus by the proliferation of public universities in the last one and a half decades. The complexities involved in managing this widened university system, in the context of pluralistic political groupings, calls for a more open recruitment approach for senior university managers.

Our proposal here is that the time has arrived for a much more merit-based criteria
for the identification and recruitment of university managers in Kenya and other comparable African political systems that have yet to adopt this strategy.

To start with, the reality on the ground is that it is no longer practical to have one person in the name of the Head of State as the Chancellor of all public universities in Kenya. Time seems opportune to apply the clause in the Acts of Public Universities that “the President shall...appoint some other person as the Chancellor of the University if he sees it fit to do so.” He should see it fit to do so because the public universities are many and can more effectively be steered by each having its own Chancellor. Those to be appointed should be “eminent persons in the country with experience in university affairs” (Sifuna, 1998, p.207). The President may still appoint such persons but from a list of recommended names by the Council and Senate of each university.

Recruitment of other senior university managers should be done through competitive procedures. This should take the form of advertising the job in the mass media, receipt of applications complete with curriculum vitae; followed by shortlisting, interviewing of candidates, and finally the selection and appointment of the person considered most suitable. The following advertisement, which appeared in an established international magazine is illustrative of the point I am making here:

**Vice-Chancellor**

The University is seeking a successor to Professor Ron Cooke who, after nine very successful years, retires in 2002. Candidates must be of exceptional calibre with evident academic credibility, clear strategic vision and the necessary leadership qualities. They will have senior level experience in an institution with a high research profile and be able to show management experience. The ability to develop new income streams and promote the university in a regional, national and international context is essential. 

......a comprehensive CV and covering letter including remuneration details, should be made to........ (The Economist, September, 2001, p.128).

Similar specifications can be made for positions of Deputy Vice-Chancellors, College Principals and their Deputies, and Registrars. As stated in the quoted advertisement, there would be applications from those who feel they have the requisite credentials.
The Council and Senate of the concerned university should then put in place a shortlisting committee to vet the applications. Perhaps after careful screening, the three most promising (competitive) candidates for each position should be invited for interviews.

The Promotion and Appointments Committee of Council, which has university senate representatives, and where necessary, representatives of other groups in the university, should handle the interviews. The process of interviews should take the following form: Each invited candidate should spend a whole day in the university, during which time, in the presence of some members of the Promotion and Appointments Committee, he/she would be required to discuss his or her vision for the University during tenure of office, to the following groups:

- Members of the University Council
- University Senate
- Student Leaders
- Representatives of non-unionisable (Administrative Staff)
- Representatives of unionised staff.

Each of the above groups should give a rating score for the candidate. The remaining two candidates should similarly go through the same process and receive their ratings.

In the last stage, members of the Council’s Promotion and Appointments Committee would make the final decision, guided primarily by each candidate’s merit ranking. It is quite possible that the Council Committee can decline to offer a job to the most highly rated candidate if there are compelling reasons to do so. Possibilities include a past criminal record that comes to light after the interviews for the job; or presentation by a candidate of false information such as fake certificates. In this case, the Council and Senate should be informed of this type of decision.

The open and competitive recruitment of senior university managers advocated here is, of course, an established practice in universities in the industrialized countries. It is also a practice in the African country of South Africa. Since in terms of social cohesion, the Republic of South Africa is not much better off than a good number of
other African states, there are really no justifiable grounds for failing to rely on open and competitive methods of recruiting key university managers in a country such as Kenya or Uganda or Cameroon to mention three.

I believe that practices related to the recruitment of senior university administrators as are to be found in some US universities as well as South African Universities will in a matter of a few years become routine in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa. Box 1 refers to recruitment procedures in an American (US) university, while Box 2 details a South African practice.

**Box 1: Chancellor Announces Presidential Selection Committee**

Brown University Chancellor Stephen Robert today announced the membership of the Corporation’s Presidential Selection Committee. The Committee, composed entirely of trustees and fellows, will be assisted by a 13-member committee of faculty, students and staff. We intend to consult broadly and seek out the views of faculty, students and staff. Our selection process will honor the University’s educational values of participation and open discussion.

(Internet release, February 26, 2000)

**Box 2: Wit’s New Vice-Chancellor**

Professor Colin Bundy was selected as Wit’s new Vice-Chancellor. His selection was the outcome of an historic process whereby all stakeholders at Wits were able to play a constructive role at all stages of the selection. The interviews and announcements associated with the selection process were made available to the general public, including live video recorded interviews and public addresses. This sometimes arduous process has resulted in an unprecedented consensus among all constituencies. The announcement of Professor Bundy’s selection has been greeted by widespread enthusiasm not only on campus but also in the broader society and media.

(Internet release, February 26, 2001)

The above two citations aptly capture the thrust of our proposal regarding the future direction of identifying and recruiting senior managers of African public universities.
The approach is transparent, participatory and merit focussed. Certainly, Kenya has the infrastructure to recruit senior university managers using the modalities highlighted for the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). No wonder that some of those selected by the approach such as at Wits receive wide acclaim and support, both of which enhance a new incumbent’s assumption of duty and perhaps the fervour to persist.

Conclusion
Up to this time many of Africa’s senior university managers have been appointed by political authorities in a manner that appears secretive and arbitrary. Perhaps the conditions of the time warranted this practice. But simply because this has been the practice does not, ipso facto, justify continuing in this manner.

This paper has proposed that conditions have now changed to correct a practice which in the context of university ethos and ideology has been an anomaly. Of the various selection procedures for senior university managers considered in this paper, the open and competitive recruitment approach has been singled out for possible adoption. This approach would bring the recruitment of senior university managers in line with extant practice for academic and other professional, technical and clerical grades.

References


*The Economist*, (2001), September 8th - 14th, p. 128.

University of Nairobi ACT (1985)
