

THE University of Zimbabwe has introduced a new online distance learning facility to enhance the training of high level manpower at affordable rates.

The learning facility, which has state-of-the-art machinery worth over US\$100 000, was acquired with the assistance of the African Development Bank and African Virtual University of Kenya.

The new learning system is also being accessed in more than 10 African countries.

Speaking at the official launch of the Open Distance and e-Learning Centre at UZ on Friday, Higher and Tertiary Education Deputy Minister Senator Lutho Tapela, said the new learning facility would help the country to curb brain drain.

"The past few years have seen unprecedented brain drain in various professional fields in Zimbabwe including teaching.

"The training of mathematics and science teachers on a large scale comes at a time when the country is grappling with the shortage of graduates at both secondary and tertiary levels.

"ODEL offers both the nation and the region a most welcome reprieve as the intervention will also help facilitate the training of high level manpower for the revival of the economy at affordable rates," said Sen Tapela.

He said Government welcomed the initiative and would provide human resource support to expand the programme to various parts of the country.

He challenged all Internet service providers to assist the enhancement of the programme for it

to benefit students both in urban and rural areas.

"I want to challenge the business community to provide Internet services within or close to our secondary schools and 3G cellphone coverage at secondary schools for the benefit of teachers and students.

"Network providers such as NetOne, Econet and Telecel are urged to support these programmes so that students out in the field can access the ODEL Centre from a variety of centres," said Sen Tapela.

Speaking at the same event, the representative of the African Virtual University Professor Bakary Diallo, said ODEL was meant to equip learning institutions with the relevant skills to adapt to the modern ways of e-Learning.

"The AVU capacity enhancement programme is designed to develop skills that institutions need to adapt their existing programmes and to develop them and deliver their own e-Learning programmes," he said.

To achieve this, training was provided in three vital areas: Materials development for ODEL programmes; delivery and technology of ODEL programmes and governance; and management and financing of ODEL programmes. Between 2008 and 2009, the AVU trained 133 staff from 24 universities in 17 countries to use e-Learning methods in their curriculums and in managing distance learning programmes.

Meanwhile, the UZ 2010 academic year commences on January 25. The university is encouraging all students who are failing to raise fees to apply for the Government's cadetship programme.

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