

Opening remarks by the Vice-Chancellor of Coal City University at the induction of Visiting Scholars to the University

Protocol

Welcome

Welcome to this auspicious occasion. First, I would like to thank the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and visionary Chancellor of Coal City University, Sir Chinedu Ani, esteemed Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council, Distinguished Professor Chinedu Nebo and other members of the Governing Council and Strategic Advisory Board for gracing this induction programme, with their presence.

My profound appreciation, also, goes to our special Guest of Honour, the Chancellor of our sister University, Sir Arthur Jarvis Archibong, joining us, all the way from Cross River state. I am also particularly pleased to welcome our renowned keynote speaker, Professor Osita Ogbu, a former Minister of National Planning and former Chief Economic Advisor to the President of Nigeria, for accepting to be with us, in spite of his very busy schedule. With us, also, are Professor Chidi Onyia, Professor Chibuikwe Uche, Professor Chukwumerije Okereke and Dr Obinna Uguru, our resource gurus whose presence is appreciated beyond common expression. They will be properly introduced in due course.

On behalf of the Chancellor, the University Governing Council, Management, Staff and students of Coal City University, I wish to warmly and formally welcome our Visiting Professors and Fellows, virtually from across the globe. We are immensely delighted and honoured.

Context

The engagement of international Visiting Professors and Fellows underscore Coal City University's stellar international focus and status as a prescient university in Nigeria, with aims of providing globally competitive education at significantly lower costs. Coal City University initiated the Visiting Scholar Fellowship Programme to ameliorate the Nigerian higher education system which erstwhile global esteem is in a downward spiral, often, at the bottom of global ranking systems based on teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook. Notably, lack of adoption of innovative teaching and learning approaches in Nigerian universities, partly, compromises the graduates' employment prospects, especially as the prevailing educational experience lacks a two-way interactive and reflective process key to stimulating intellectual curiosity and creative development of students. Not surprising, with recent Nigerian graduates, somewhat, deemed inadequately prepared for employment, many students prefer to study abroad.

I have often shared with colleagues my experience studying in the United Kingdom. My first class, at the University of Leicester, in September 2000, was so radically different from my undergraduate experience of teacher-centred pedagogy in Nigeria. At the end of the lecture, I started asked myself a number of questions: why are we not adopting similar pedagogy in all Nigerian universities? Why are we not prioritising students learning experience? Why the overly focus on rote learning at the expense of deep learning and skill development?

Remarkably, another inspirational spark came from teaching post graduate students, at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, during summer breaks. Seeing their ardent disposition, to learning, nudged my decision to leave a well-paid job, as an established senior academic in the UK, with all the benefits and career development prospects, to deploy my skills and experience in contributing to Nigeria's university system. Along those lines, I have continued to canvas for the return of Nigerian scholars from the diaspora. I have been facilitating the return of a number of top Nigerian Scholars from the diaspora to the Nigerian University System. I am especially delighted that one of them, Professor Chukwumerije Okereke, a globally recognised scholar in Environment and Development Studies, will share his experience with us, today.

Purpose of the Visiting Fellowship

In line with Coal City University's commitment to a robust learning environment, without barricades, our curriculum, pedagogy, research, service delivery, staff acquisition, student mobility and experience, we recognise and value the strategic roles of international visiting scholars in our finer aspirations. The University is inducting 55 Visiting Professors and Fellows across the three faculties of the University for the 2020-2022 academic sessions. These highly accomplished and globally recognized scholars will collaborate with their CCU colleagues, on joint projects, research, teaching, integrating experiences, competencies, principles and practices, primed on delivering outstanding learning experiences to students. Consequently, during each semester, CCU's students will have significant number of British and American trained professors who are renowned in their various field teach them in-class and remotely via our robust virtual learning platform (myCCU). I wish to assure our Visiting Scholars that the dedication of Coal City University students and their zest for acquiring knowledge will make teaching in the University a unique pleasure! The University is committed to supporting international Visiting Scholars in planning their journey and during their entire stay at our University. If the visiting scholar has no other financial sponsorship, the University will provide local transportation (back and forth the University daily) and accommodation throughout the duration of their stay in Coal City University.

Transfer of knowledge can also take place 'virtually' through our virtual learning platform. As some of you are aware, since March 2020, Coal City University has been delivering online lectures on a university-wide scale to ensure that our students progress and graduate timely, depending on their level. We are among the Universities in Nigeria that have robust online capabilities. The progress we have made in e-learning has officially put us ahead of many older universities and this has

been acknowledged widely in the country. With the diaspora networks, durable and fruitful alliances, scintillating currents and circulation of knowledge, prospects of capacity building they engender, will undoubtedly support and strengthen the institution's educational mission and vision. More importantly, with the number of academic staff with international background engaged by the University, Nigerian students will now be able to experience world class education in Coal City University without going abroad to study.

Conclusion

In ending this opening remarks, let me thank the organizing committee of this induction programme headed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for doing a great job. As we get ready for a feast of ideas, today, spiced with stimulating presentations and productive exchanges, I am confident that a coherent picture and requisite framework will emerge, to engage the academic diaspora effectively for greater relevance and global competitiveness of Coal City University, as a model world class institution in Nigeria. With a resplendent future envisaged for Nigeria's university system, within sight, let us step forward with a renewed sense of confidence and purpose.

On this note, it is my honour to declare this induction programme officially open, to the glory of God and benefit of humanity. Thank you, very much, for your attention and may God bless us all.

Prof. Afam Icha-Ituma

Vice-Chancellor

7th September, 2020