

1 JANUARY 2007

Vol 2 No. 1

ISSN 0795-3089

A Note From the Executive Secretary in the New Year

On behalf of the NUC Board and Management, I wish to congratulate everyone of us for making it through to the year 2007; we owe our gratitude to God for this. Since my assumption of office as the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission barely five months ago, we have together taken some giant strides in the development of university education in our great nation. Your collective effort was the thrust behind the success recorded in 2006. I must therefore extend my profound appreciation to the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, *GCFR* for his massive support to Nigerian Universities in 2006. My appreciation also goes to Madam Minister of Education, Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili for her visionary leadership and dogged commitment to the transformation of the universities in particular and the education sector in general. The Senate and House Committees of Education must also be appreciated for their immeasurable support to the University System. Our Pro-Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors - the Generals on the field - deserve unalloyed appreciation for bracing up to the challenges of university administration and governance as well as ensuring stability in the institutions during the just ended year. To the NUC family, I say a very big “well-done” for your efforts in 2006. One cannot be oblivious of the proactive initiative you bring to bear in the discharge of your duties and which has led to many far-reaching policy decisions. These have in turn further strengthened the Nigerian University System.

The dawn of a New Year is opportunity to pursue with renewed vigour the mandates with which we are charged. Consequently, the year 2007 demands greater dedication from all and sundry so that our University System could rise to the challenges of national expectations and relevance in the global arena. We have the reform of the University System to take to the next level and ensconce other specific activities like operationalizing the revised BMAS, developing instruments for postgraduate accreditation, introduction of institutional accreditation and the commencement of entrepreneurial education in Nigerian universities. All these are to be pursued in addition to university programme audit, programmes verification, fostering stronger university-industry relations, physical development activities in the universities and many others. It is also imperative that research in Nigerian universities be propelled to heights that are comparable to what obtains internationally.

I strongly believe that at the end of 2007 we will look back and be proud of our achievements if we work with a high sense of commitment and vision. On this note, I wish you all a very fruitful and prosperous 2007. Happy New Year!!!

NUC Scribe Holds Maiden Press Briefing

Continued from last week's bulletin

Research in Nigerian universities has continued to receive a boost through the NUC with the establishment of the Teaching and Research Equipment Grant (TREG); Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair (NUREDEF); Central Research Fund (CRF) scheme; Book of Abstracts; Nigerian University System Journal (NUSJ); and Equipment Maintenance Development Project.

Other activities of the Commission cover coordination of Academic Planning and Research monitoring visits; University System Annual Review Meeting (USARM); Carrying Capacity and calculation and review of admission quotas; development and analysis of various government educational policies, Strategic Planning Sensitization Workshops and Seminars.

On academic linkages, partnership activities with UNESCO, Open Society Initiative for West Africa, MacArthur Foundation, Embassies and Alliance for Earth Sciences, Engineering and Development in Africa (AESEDA) were reported. The Executive Secretary also talked on the weekly Television programme "Voyage of Discovery" and partnership with Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation

Continuing, Professor Julius A. Okojie spoke on the intervention of the Commission on ICT development in Nigerian universities. According to him, the Commission has facilitated the installation and support of Network cables, connectivity and interconnectivity devices in Federal universities; facilitated and offered free consultancy services to universities and Inter-University Centers on ICT. The expectation of the Commission is that research outputs from universities be published in the respective university's website in compliance with global practice; thus universities should maintain vibrant websites. Specifically, the Commission is working towards having a Nigerian University Network that will facilitate the coordination of activities within the Nigerian University System. Areas of consideration include media conferencing, data collection and information dissemination, e-learning support services: IP (Internet Protocol) Phones and website development.

In the last seven years according to the Executive Secretary, the Commission has taken certain reform measures considered necessary to respond to the challenges of the University System in view of the current policy thrust of Government. As part of its reform measures, the Commission felt there was the need to reduce the number of its Departments through mergers and re-alignment of functions. Consequently, the number of departments in the Commission was reduced from seven (7) to five (5).

Staff audit exercises were conducted in 2002, 2004 and 2005. These exercises led to the redeployment of many staff to cadres and positions where they were deemed most relevant. In September 2006, the NUC Board set up the Public Service Reform Implementation Committee (RIC) to carry out Federal Government Reform Agenda in the Commission. The Executive Secretary believed that the following will form the Commission's post-reform activities:

- Development and regular review of BMAS for undergraduate/postgraduate programmes taught in Nigerian universities to ensure relevance and currency;

- Developing and testing instruments for institutional accreditation. Initially, a dual mode of programmes cum institutional accreditation may be adopted;
- Ensuring institutionalization of quality assurance mechanisms at university level;
- Setting up and implementing guidelines/standards for cross border education;
- Liaising with stakeholders/professional bodies to jointly ensure quality of university education through setting minimum standards and accreditation.
- Inspection and monitoring of university activities. This will become more important in the new Commission as there will be zero-tolerance to poor administration, poorly resourced programmes and poor programme delivery.
- Monitoring of research quality and output as well as promotion of piloting and patenting.
- Ensuring quality inputs (human and material), efficient programme delivery and qualitative graduate and research output. This will involve student screening for admission as well as tracking through school to NYSC and further to employment.
- Ensure quality development of programmes in Nigerian universities, the Commission will ensure that no programmes are established without prior approval of the Commission as the universities have been adequately mobilized to meet post reform challenges.
- Ensure that the two-year incubation period required for the establishment of new academic programmes/units and splitting of programmes/units is duly adhered to by all Nigerian universities.
- Periodically update and publish list of approved academic programmes in Nigerian universities in order to acquaint all stakeholders and the general public with relevant information in this regard.
- Creation of database that would keep tab with the goings-on in universities, especially as it concerns the researchers, their inventions and publications.
- Organizing Equipment Maintenance/Repair Workshops on a regular basis so as to sensitize users on the best practices of equipment maintenance.
- Step up development control activities in universities to effectively monitor physical development on university campuses.
- Develop a more robust ICT database on space utilisation, land holding, infrastructural development, building conditions status in all university campuses in Nigeria for documentation and planning.
- Embark on periodic capital projects inspection in all Universities to ensure conformity with the approved master plan and standard stipulated by the NUC.
- Continue to co-ordinate the Due Process activities between the Universities and the BMPIU for effective project execution and cost control.
- Review Standard Guide for planning and implementation of capital projects in Nigeria Universities to reflect changing policies and present day economic realities.
- Intensify the process of developing a Physical Planning and Development information base in Universities using the Geographic Information System (G.I.S.).

In conclusion the NUC Scribe x-rayed some expected challenges of the reform that the Commission must surmount in order to get the desired result.

Capacity Building: A big challenge is in the area of human capacity to carry out increased responsibilities occasioned by the reforms. As a result, training and retraining of staff will be required to guarantee effective and efficient service delivery.

Institutional Accreditation: With the trend in global changes, there is a gradual shift from programme accreditation to institutional accreditation. This will require more documentation, time, funds as well as personnel for the exercise.

Cross Border Education: Due to the liberalization of higher education in the African region, and in the world, the Commission is yet to evolve modalities for the implementation of the guidelines developed in 2005.

Accreditation of Open University programmes: The programmes being run in the National Open University of Nigeria will be due for accreditation in June, 2007. The instruments used for the accreditation of programmes run by Open and Distance Learning modes will be used in the exercise. However, with the wide distribution of study centres of the Open University, accreditation of the programmes will be a special challenge.

Accreditation of part-time programmes: Arrangement has been concluded for the accreditation of part-time programmes in Nigerian universities in August 2007 when part-time students will be in session in the universities

Inspection of Universities: The law empowering NUC to regulate and accredit university programmes clearly devolved the responsibility for inspection on the Commission. The Commission will work hard early in 2007 to develop the guidelines and modalities for inspection of universities and their activities as envisaged by the enabling law. The Commission will certainly need more staff to achieve this mandate and will also consciously work towards building the capacity of its existing staff.

At the end of the briefing, the gentlemen of the Press engaged the Executive Secretary's presentation through questions and contributions that were related to the NUC and the Nigerian University System. Some commented on the need to make the Press briefing more regular, while questions were asked on the Commission's stand on the closure of Lagos State University (LASU) part-time programmes. Contributions were also made on the need for a wider circulation of *Monday Bulletin*. Professor Okojie assured the Pressmen that efforts would be made to give the Bulletin a wider circulation. He reminded the Pressmen that the Bulletin could be accessed on-line from the Commission's website. On the LASU issue, he reaffirmed that the Commission has not changed its decision on the affected programmes.

In conclusion, the Executive Secretary expressed his appreciation to the Press for gracing the Press Conference and hoped for a more cordial relationship with members of the Forth Estate of the Realm. He wished all a merry Christmas and a happy Sallah and New year celebrations.