FUTO IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Inaugural Address to the Senate

Professor Chigozie C. Asiabaka, Ph.D., KSM, JP
6th Substantive Vice-Chancellor
FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI, NIGERIA
TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2011
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

I welcome you to this Extraordinary Meeting of Senate. Permit me to start this inaugural address by thanking every person who contributed in making this day come true.

I thank members of Senate for their contributions and efforts towards the realization of the mission and vision of FUTO. I doff my hat for your doggedness, objectivity and consistency in ensuring transparency in the process of the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor. I thank you for giving impetus to our academic endeavours.

To our Deans, Heads of Department and other academic support staff, I recognize and appreciate your work in the University. Additionally, I appreciate the cordial relationship you have with students and other members of staff under your supervision.

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

I am overwhelmed with joy, but at the same time humbled that by the grace of God, I am appointed the 6th Substantive Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

2.0 MISSION OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY

The Federal Universities of Technology were established in the 1980s as corporate bodies with a definite mission: to operate practical and result-oriented programmes and training geared towards transforming the nation’s economy from consumer-oriented to production-oriented, with a sound technological base.

This calls for, not merely understanding and using existing technology but advancing and harnessing technology for the development of the immediate environs of each university, in particular, and the nation, in general.

The above mission has been fully elaborated and carefully embodied in the Federal Universities of Technology Act, CAP 143 (Laws of the Federal Government of Nigeria) establishing the FUTs with the following objectives:

i) To encourage the advancement of learning and to hold out to all persons without distinction of race, creed, sex or political conviction, the opportunity of acquiring a higher education in technology;

ii) To develop and offer academic and professional programmes leading to the award of diplomas, first degrees, postgraduate research and higher degrees which emphasize planning, adaptive, technical, maintenance, developmental and productive skills in the engineering, scientific, agricultural, medical and allied professional disciplines with the aim of producing socially mature men and
women with capacity not only to understand, use and adapt existing technology, but also improve on it and develop new ones; (in other words, producing technological manpower that exhibits initiative, self confidence, innovation and experience of the real problems of the world of work rather than the world of institution and that would be immediately productive in any venture or gainful employment);

iii) To act as agents and catalysts, through postgraduate training, research and innovation for the effective and economic utilization, exploitation and conservation of the country's natural, economic and human resources;

iv) To offer to the general population, as a form of public service, the results of training and research and to foster the practical application of these results;

v) To establish the appropriate relationships with other institutions involved in training, research and development of technologies;

vi) To identify technological problems and needs of the society and find solutions to them within the context of overall national development;

vii) To provide and promote sound basic scientific training as a foundation for the development of technology and applied sciences, taking into account indigenous culture and the need to enhance national unity; and

viii) To undertake any other activities appropriate for universities of technology of the highest standards.

3.0 STRENGTHS

- Amidst the changes which characterized the educational landscape in Nigeria, FUTO still enjoys the distinctive advantage of being the only Federal University of Technology East of the Niger.

- In view of its proximity to multi-national organizations involved in oil exploration, FUTO also enjoys the distinctive advantage of being able to draw from a pool of qualified professionals within and outside the University.

- FUTO has an opportunity to reinforce its role as an "incubator" for the production of practical-oriented technologists and also a veritable centre for experimentation.

- FUTO is located in a serene and rich natural environment which is very apt for academic work.

- FUTO has the opportunity to re-position itself and re-strategize in its mandate and focus its research and teaching on areas where it has core competencies and comparative advantage.
4.0 CHALLENGES AND THREATS

The challenges facing the University are numerous and they have militated against the actualization of the institutional goals and objectives. It is necessary to identify some of these problems with a view to addressing them. They are:

- Inadequate infrastructure
- Administration of examinations
- Lateness to meetings
- Examination malpractices
- Non-release of examination results
- Geometric growth in student population without corresponding increase in the number of academic staff
- Geometric increase in the number of non-teaching staff
- Inadequate supervision of academic staff
- Inadequate laboratories, lecture halls, office accommodation
- Inadequate equipment for teaching and research
- General laissez faire attitude of staff and students, e.g. lateness to work by staff and failure of students to return to the University according to the University Calendar.

5.0 MY VISION FOR THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI (FUTO) IN THE 21ST CENTURY

To re-position FUTO to be a top-ranked-first class institution of excellence in technological knowledge production and dissemination, through teaching, research and service to humankind.

I am privileged to invite you to come with me on a journey to the future direction of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO). This journey will in the next five years transform FUTO to a world-class University, in fulfillment of the vision of our founding fathers. In order to get to the future we must summon the courage to move forward against uncertainties and so many challenges. But we cannot get to the future without knowledge of the past. This great University has helped to shape and define the history of this state and the nation. FUTO is an institution with many milestones that mark over 30 years of education and service to our community and to our state; FUTO is an institution that has served proudly as a member of the nation's public higher education family.

The vision of transforming the University into a world-class University would not be realized if it is business as usual. In order to achieve this transformation, we will envisage a FUTO with committed teaching and non-teaching staff, motivated students, a
FUTO with state-of-the-art laboratories and classrooms, a FUTO with functional sports complex (mini-stadium), a FUTO with green and grassy lawns, a FUTO that sees itself as family, a FUTO that adheres to rules and regulations, a FUTO that is abundant in equity, fairness and transparency, a FUTO with electricity, with internet access throughout the campus and fully computerized. FUTO must remain a meritocracy, open to people of talent from every part of the country, Africa and the rest of the world. We must dream big to move the University to enviable heights. Our dream must stretch beyond the borders of FUTO.

Today, top 20 universities such as Harvard (1), Oxford (2) Cambridge (3), Yale (4), Imperial College (5), Princeton (6), California Institute of Technology (7), University of Chicago (8), University College, London (9), MIT (10) and others command world-wide respect and admiration and set the standards for “world-class university”. The requisites for a world-class university include the capacity to attract scholars and scientists of the highest quality. This means first-class facilities, adequate funding to support research and competitive remuneration. No African university made the list in the first 200. Only one or two South African universities made the first 500.

The criteria for ranking of universities globally shall be addressed frontally. This looks stringent but to ensure competitiveness, FUTO needs re-engineering, re-organization and re-orientation. In order to realize the above vision, there is urgent need to provide the enabling environment for effective teaching, learning and research so that staff and students can interact and compete effectively with their counterparts at the national and international levels. In the latest rankings by NUC, FUTO did not make the list of first 20 universities in Nigeria. The University was also not listed among the universities with outstanding courses in agriculture, engineering or the sciences. A look at the criteria for ranking of universities in the world showed that certain indices are reckoned with. FUTO is not ranked among the African and/or world universities irrespective of our natural endowments and wealth. The criteria used by NUC are:

- percentage of programmes in the university with full accreditation status
- compliance with carrying capacity
- proportion of academic staff at professional level
- foreign content staff, proportion of the students who are foreign students
- proportion of staff with outstanding achievements and research output
- students completion rate
- Ph.D. graduate output
- University stability

Since FUTO is a player in the global arena, my vision implementation strategy shall focus on those criteria used not only by NUC, but those criteria used by Times Higher
Education Supplement and other agencies in ranking Universities in the world. The criteria have been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Ranking Criteria and Weights for the Times Higher Education Supplement-THES and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Quality</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>Composite score drawn from peer review</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citations per Faculty</td>
<td>Score based on research performance factored against the size of the research body</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Employability</td>
<td>Recruiter Review</td>
<td>Score based on survey of employers</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Outlook</td>
<td>International Faculty</td>
<td>Score based on proportion of international faculty</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International Students</td>
<td>Score based on proportion of International students</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Quality</td>
<td>Student/ Faculty ratio</td>
<td>Score based on student/faculty ratio</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For FUTO to remain relevant in technological knowledge production and transfer and knowledge economy, it has to be re-positioned for re-entry into micro and macro-level competitiveness. There is need to re-engineer the organizational, structural and operational modes of governance of the University. In this regard, all the four criteria stated above shall be vigorously addressed through a seven-pronged approach, namely: Research Quality; Graduate Employability; International Outlook; Student/Staff Ratio; Expanding Access and Infrastructural Facilities; Promoting and Assuring Quality; and Increasing Institutional Efficiency at all Levels.

5.1 Research Quality

The focus of research shall be in areas where FUTO has comparative advantage and core competencies. The implication is that our research shall be demand-driven and based on the needs of relevant local industries, e.g. the oil and food companies. I
believe that FUTO has the unique opportunity to collaborate with industry and other agencies of government to create technologies and jobs needed for the 21st century economy. I believe that universities have to contribute to building human capacity. Well-educated innovative leaders, educators, scientists, entrepreneurs, engineers and agriculturalists are needed for solutions to human problems.

The post-graduate programmes shall be expanded for relevance and service to the catchment areas in tandem with current knowledge economy driving the global development agenda. Quality research is needed to move the post-graduate school to competitiveness. The Directorate of General Studies shall be strengthened to enable it operate efficiently as a service unit. The Directorate should also be encouraged to diversify its programmes to include areas of societal needs. The Centre for Vocational and Entrepreneurial Studies shall be strengthened to address the employability of graduates.

Efforts shall be made to select through problem identification/stakeholder workshops, the areas of core research competencies where the University has comparative advantage. Grants for both basic and applied research shall be sourced from agencies such as International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), International Foundation For Science (IFS), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, Support Africa International, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID) and similar organizations. A new Directorate of Research, Development and Extension shall be established. This office will be directly under the Vice Chancellor but would have Research Fellows/Associates - a Think Tank. Their prime job would be proposal writing and sourcing for research grants from donors and other agencies. Most research activities would be end user/demand-driven, research focus should be on areas of core competence, e.g. specialization in areas of industrial demand from oil exploration companies, food companies and core parastatals, etc.

5.2 Graduate Employability
As a University of Technology, FUTO must ensure that its academic programmes remain relevant in the 21st Century. A detailed and in-depth review of the University academic programmes and curricula shall be carried out in line with the NUC approved minimum academic standards.

This implies that we must strive to produce not only employers of labour but marketable graduates who would be the toast of employers. The input of the private sector shall be solicited to ensure that the programmes meet the challenges and demands of the job market. The assistance of the alumni of the University shall also be sought and strengthened.
5.3 International Outlook
Efforts will be made to employ international staff and encourage student/staff exchange and encourage collaborative research, e.g. WARE project (FUTO, MIT, China Agricultural University, etc), Support Africa International (FUTO, University of Benin, Abomey-Calavi, Rep. of Benin, Moi University, Kenya), staff development (University of Sierra Leone), split M.Sc/Ph.D. programmes (Salford University, UK), etc. Informal contacts have been made with universities in the EU countries and UK.

We will facilitate concrete linkages with universities in Africa and the rest of the world.

5.4 Student / Staff Ratio
The NUC approved ratio of 1:15 for Agriculture, Science and Engineering is yet to be met. Overall Teacher Staff ratio, TSR in 2008/2009 was 1:35, and 1:26 in 2009/2010. Recommended TSR is SAAT (1:15), SOSG (1:20), SEET (1:15), SOHT (1:15), SMAT and DGS (1:30). The enhancement and improvement of a manageable ratio shall be vigorously pursued.

There is need to recruit more academic staff. We will focus on training positions - Graduate Assistants and Assistant Lecturers. We will also emphasize the practical mission of the University through re-invigorated SIWES and use of employer surveys for the assessment of the performance of graduates.

5.5 Expanding Access and Infrastructural Facilities
Expanded access for more students shall be the focus of my vision. This shall be accomplished through the establishment of new but innovative academic programmes. The existing infrastructure shall be expanded and on-going projects completed. This will reduce the inadequacy of classrooms and laboratories.

5.5.1 Full Computerization of all Aspects of University Activities
The full computerization of all aspects of the University activities is long overdue. All categories of staff shall undergo computer training in the use of various software and computer applications. Purchase and installation of computers in all offices shall be embarked upon. A Database Management System that will serve the peculiar needs of the University shall be installed and security policies enforced to avoid unauthorized access to the database. After all, a paperless University is achievable. Every aspect of student registration, accounting, results, etc will be fully computerized.

5.6 Promoting and Assuring Quality
A university is known by the quality of its graduates. This vision seeks to enhance the promotion and assurance of best practices in university management and governance.

A committee will be set up to develop a five-year strategic plan 2011-2016. There is need to fortify existing programmes, strengthen new programmes such as the
departments in the Directorate of General Studies, School of Environmental Sciences and Technology and others. Examination results and computation shall be released in a maximum period of four weeks.

There is need to establish Centres of Excellence in one or two areas of core competencies in any of the existing Schools. A new Directorate for External Linkages and Programmes (DELP) shall be established. This will be responsible for articulating and sourcing student and staff linkages with national and international organizations. This will not only strengthen FUTO programmes but will also boost its rating.

There is urgent need to reduce in-breeding among the academic staff in the University. Staff shall be encouraged to obtain their post-graduate degrees from other Universities. The activities of DELP will be very handy in this regard to boost cross fertilization in knowledge creation, utilization, internationalization and dissemination. Staff shall be encouraged to take up sabbatical appointments outside the country while staff from foreign universities shall also be allowed to visit FUTO on sabbatical leave or on exchange programmes.

5.6.1 Academic Support Units
The Library, the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), Directorate of General Studies shall be made to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Appropriate committees will be set up to fine tune this and make recommendations as appropriate.

5.6.2 Academic Prizes and Scholarship Schemes
Prizes and scholarships are hallmarks of academic excellence. Discussions are going on to attract prizes and scholarship from industries. All Schools are encouraged to institute Dean’s Honours list for students with CGPA of 4.50 and above in each semester.

5.7 Increasing Institutional Efficiency at all Levels
This calls for staff motivation, and strengthening of the functions of management such as directing, coordinating and supervision.

5.7.1 Time Management
Time is a scarce resource that should not be wasted. In this regard, all meetings of Senate shall start promptly. This same approach will be used in all businesses of the University. Time management shall be enforced.

5.7.2 Almanac of Events
This will be released at the beginning of each month. In this way, all activities of the University for the month should be scheduled. This prevents time and venue clashes of University events.
5.7.3 Accreditation of Programmes
Records available indicate that not all the courses offered in FUTO have full accreditation. Efforts shall be made to ensure full accreditation of all courses. The problem of accreditation emanates from the dearth of staff, equipment and laboratory facilities and these shall be addressed.

5.7.4 Membership of the University Senate
This will be reviewed quickly to determine de facto members of the Senate. The Standing Order of the Senate should be reviewed. In this regard, the communications to University Senate should also be re-visited.

5.7.5 Elections into Senate Committees
Elections into Senate committees shall be conducted as soon as possible.

5.7.6 Course Registration
The use of drop and add will be strictly applied. Final class lists shall be prepared for the purpose of ascertaining the total number of registered students in every course.

5.7.7 Student Admission
The astronomical growth in student population is a major problem in the University. As part of the expanding access to the University, efforts shall be made to expand the carrying capacity of the University and give access to more students by creating new but demand-driven programmes.

However, all admissions must be School and Department-based. This will ensure transparency of the exercise. Admissions must end before matriculation.

5.7.8 Information and Communication Technology
Globalization is ICT driven. The University needs to have full access to the internet. Special arrangements shall be entered into with ICT firms to ensure that every office in FUTO has access to the internet. Efforts shall be made to improve the quality and quantity of ICT facilities in FUTO.

A loan facility aimed at assisting every staff to own a computer shall be pursued vigorously.

5.7.9 Utilization of Best Practices
To move the University towards excellence, we will always utilize best practices in the areas of:

- Good governance, through Council and Administration Complementarities
- Division of Labour
6.0 SUMMARY
In line with the strategic vision spelt out, attempts shall be made in FUTO’s development over the period 2011-2016 as follows:

- Review of all academic programmes to ensure competitiveness in the era of knowledge economy
- Re-training of all categories of staff for institutional efficiency, especially in ICT use in different departments/units
- Strengthening the Student Affairs Unit to be more responsive to the needs of the students
- Encouraging staff motivation through appropriate incentives
- Construction of student hostels
- The completion of on-going Departmental/School projects/buildings
- The commencement of new Departmental/Unit Buildings
- The Creation of the Directorate for External Linkages and Programmes
- Identifying of Research for Development (R&D) core competencies
- Establishment of a Directorate for University Endowments
- Establishment a Directorate of Research, Development and Extension
- Strengthening all existing centres/institutes
- Re-orientation of staff and students
- Recruitment of more academic staff
- Recruitment of more academic support staff
- Recruitment of more international academic staff
7.0 CONCLUSION

Ideas must work through the brains and arms of good men and women, or they are no better than dreams. The vision of FUTO that I have enumerated must translate out of the realm of dreams into the realm of actions. FUTO must invest in the staff and students, emphasize quality programmes and curriculum, enhance their quality of research and development, internationalize, improve on staff/student ratio and assure the quality of their graduates. We have set for ourselves ambitious but realizable goals. Let us come together as a team to transform FUTO to world class-university. The time to re-focus FUTO to the vision of its founding fathers has come. FUTO will change, FUTO will grow in strength and strength. It will grow as a centre of excellence. It will grow to be the foremost university of technology in Nigeria and beyond. Our surroundings will also change and be environmentally friendly. Our ways of doing things in FUTO will change and it will not be business as usual. Our pedagogical tools will change. Our attitudes to work will change. We must always dream big-dream of making FUTO a world-class university. Trust yourself and have faith in God. I trust and have faith in God. With God on or side, we shall succeed.

Thank you for this great privilege to address you. May God bless us.

Professor Chigozie C. Asiabaka, Ph.D., KSM, JP