

MOUAAU's Continuing Education Centre has been fully re-engineered, now delivers timely on its mandates - *Dir. CEC, Prof, Ahamefule, says*

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The Continuing Education Centre (CEC) of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike was established to cater for the academic and professional needs of members of the society, whose work schedule may not allow them to attend full-time studies in a University. Over the years, the Centre struggled to deliver on its mandates, with myriads of complaints from students. Director of CEC, Prof. Francis O. Ahamefule however told MOUAAU News in an interview that the Centre, under Prof. Maduebibisi Ofo Iwe, has been re-engineered and now delivers on its mandates. Happy reading!

MOUAAU News: Could you tell briefly who you are and about the Office you occupy.

Director CEC: I am Professor Francis Okechukwu Ahamefule, the current Director of Continuing Education Centre, MOUAAU. I am a Professor of Animal Production and Management, in the College of Animal Science and Animal Production.

MOUAAU News: So what brings you to CEC from Animal Science & Production?

Director CEC: That's a good question. The position of the Director of Continuing

Education Centre is an appointable position. What it means is that any person across the University, who may have shown the ability and capacity in service delivery, may be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor to head this place.

Before now, I've been Head of Department of Animal Production and Livestock Management. I was once the Dean of College of Animal Science and Animal Production. I also headed the Exams and Times Table Committee (ETTC). I was there for seven years before this appointment.

“Everything has changed for the better in CEC, from lecture delivery to examination, to result computation and to release of result and graduation” - Prof. Ahamefule

So probably, having looked at my track record, the Vice-Chancellor, in his wisdom, thought I could fit in to take up the position.

MOUAAU News: Thank you. You bring a lot of values on the table for this job, and we congratulate you. How has it been these few years on this seat?

Director CEC: Well, this is about my third year here now. I assumed office on the 2nd of January, 2023. The story has changed for now, because when I came on board, we met a lot of problems, difficulties, and all that. I thank God for the retinue of staff that I have. They have passion for the job and we all want to deliver, because what actually will inform your delivery is the intention you have to be able to take on the responsibility that is given to you.

So coming on board, and with the people I met on the ground, we sat down together, and decided that we have to move this place forward. So, we hit the ground running.

We looked at all the areas we had problems, and decided to deal with them one after the other and the result is the story that I have today. Everything has changed for the better, from lecture delivery to examination, to result computation and to release of result and graduation. Everything has changed,

MOUAAU News: In setting up the CEC, I believe the University had a lot of things in mind. Could you take us through the vision and mission of CEC?

Director CEC: Well, just to highlight



as you mentioned, over time, we discovered that in most places where you have civil servants, there are situations that may arise where people may not have time to be able to undertake tertiary education.

Now, the wisdom of the University Management at the time was to set up the Continuing Education Center, where people who are working already, who probably did not have that opportunity to engage in tertiary education, could be able to come and update their knowledge. If you look around, you will observe that this is mainly a civil service environment where you have a lot of people working. CEC presents the opportunity where people can come and be able to upgrade themselves academically and professionally.

So basically, it's a Centre that was created to be able to upgrade those who couldn't find opportunity to go to the University and who probably have been

in service for some time and need to upgrade or acquire new or higher certificates than what they have.

So, all you need is to have good O'level result. You do not necessarily need to write JAMB. Then what we do is to stretch the programme to five or six years, since it is weekends only.

So, basically, our mission is to be able to upgrade people to attend and gain tertiary education.

MOUAAU News: Would you say that the objectives for setting up the Center is being achieved?

Director CEC: I think we need to look at some of our records. In terms of number of students, who graduate from CEC, we have tremendously improved.

When we came on board, the



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“To be frank, I have a team of dedicated and committed staff who work hard with me to change the narratives about CEC”- Prof. Ahamefule



records show maybe one or two hundreds as number of graduands from CEC, but from 2023, for the first time I can remember, over 700 students were graduated. As I speak to you, we have close to 450 students who are already listed for graduation ahead of the next Convocation. In fact, with the number of students that have taken exams, what it means is that by January, close to about 700 will graduate. So, we'll be improving on that.

So, what it means is that we'll be now able to help out in trying to graduate people and make it possible for people who are seeking university education to be able to get that.

MOUUAU News: That's impressive. A lot of people argue that the intention for setting up the Continuing Education Center is usually for revenue generation, not necessarily to give people the opportunity for tertiary education. What would you say about that vis à vis the “cash cow” description of CEC?

Director CEC:

Well, I think when they refer to this place as cash cow, what I understand is that it's a programme that is designed for people who are working. Regular students pay charges, but here, students

pay school fees, but then, it's not outrageously different.

The real intention is not for revenue generation. Ok, let us say, yes, it was designed for people who are working, but over time, we also discovered that the student population is made up of the teen group. Most people who couldn't gain admission with the regular programme find time to come here. So instead of maybe the age bracket of between 30 and 40 coming here, we now have quite a number in the age bracket of between 16 and 22, as if it's in the regular programme, too. So, it would not be right to say CEC is for money. University is not for money-making. It is for acquiring knowledge. Whatever you see in the regular programme is what is happening here. The exams that we conduct, of course, is monitored by the ETTC and the Quality Assurance Committee. We draw also our staff from the regular University lecturers. We send people that would usually invigilate and supervise from the regular programme too.

So there's nothing like that. The monitoring is still superb and excellent. So it would be wrong for somebody to say this is majorly just to raise money for the University. We are also mindful of quality delivery

MOUUAU News: Thank you so much. I

will get back to the issue of quality of service delivery. Let me talk about your team. I see that you have a team of very well-known people in the University. Can you tell us about your team in this Center?

Director CEC: To be frank, I have a team of very committed and dedicated staff who are working hard daily with me to change the narrative of CEC.

Yes, I have a Deputy Director. You know him, very strong and efficient, Dr. Ernest Eteng. And the Secretary of the Center, of course, is Deputy Registrar, Richard Udushirinwa. You know him also. And then, of course, you have the Bursary Unit headed by Deputy Bursar, Anaba Calista. She's also here. And then the Exams and Records, of course, headed by a brother and friend here, Mr. Ogwo. And then the BSc. Unit is headed by a Principal Assistant Registrar, Mr. Kelechi Okoh-Eho Dike. We have the Preparatory Center that used to be Pre-degree Section, but now it's a Preparatory Center for WAEC, NECO, and JAMB headed by Mrs. Chijindu Ulunma Adindu-Chinedum.

So that's the team that I have here



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anand many more hardworking staff. God has helped us over the years to be able to maintain some high level of integrity and excellence in our ooperations.

MOUAAU News: That's impressive. And we must commend you for being a team player, working with this wonderful group of staff in this place. You talked about the Preparatory Center. I know over the years, as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility of the University, we used to prepare candidates from the catchment host communities who may want to write either O'level or JAMB at no cost. What exactly does this Preparatory Center do?

Director CEC:

Before now, it used to be the Pre-degree programme. Initially when it was established, the idea was, of course, to be able to bring people from the catchment area, where they could be prepared to sit for examination and secure admission. And then depending on their score and the cutoff point, the University will always have a place for them in admission. But over time, there was a change in that plan. JAMB now came and said, every person who must get admission to the university must go through JAMB. So that nullified that for us.

So what we're now doing here to prepare



students for WAEC and NECO and JAMB. So it's like a preparatory programme.

MOUAAU News: A number of people will argue that there is a wide difference between what you offer here and what is offered in the regular programme.

Director CEC:

Well, let me try to make this clarification because most times people do not understand our role. I want you to know that CEC is just a clearing Center. We do not offer degrees. The degrees are run in the Departments. What we do is to project those degrees. It is the same lecturers who teach regular programme that also teach CEC programmes. All we have done is to have those courses or programmes under CEC just like you have programmes in the PG School, but delivered in the Departments.

So why am I saying this? We don't have any teaching staff in CEC. They are all teaching in the University. What we do, however, is to highlight the programmes in such a way that it will not only be open to our lecturers, but for every other person who is capable and we consider efficient to



handle them. That should be the correct thing.

In terms of the programmes we run, I can tell you that we do Bsc. Part-time in Agricultural economics, Agribusiness and Management, Agronomy, Computer Science, Entrepreneurial Studies, Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Plant Health Management, Soil Science and Meteorology, Rural Sociology and Extension.

Others are Adult and Continuing Education, Agricultural Science Education, Biology Education, Integrated Science Education, Library and Information Science, Mathematics Education, Physics Education, Chemistry Education, Economics Education, Business Education and education Management. In fact, we have invited candidates to apply for admission into these programmes and the response is high.

MOUAAU News: How about the programmes in College of Management Sciences



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(COLMAS)

Director CEC: We appreciate and congratulate the VC for the re-listing of the de-listed programmes in COLMAS. We are working hard to secure NUC's approval to introduce those programmes, namely Accounting, Marketing, Business Administration, etc into our Part-time degree programmes.

Well, this Center is somewhat quasi-independent. Let me put it that way. As on paper, it looks like that, but somehow we are still attached to the University. Because it's run on a principle that 30% of what is generated here is left and will be used for the Center, both for teaching and, of course, administration of the Center. So that's how we have been running, as it were.

that College, it affected the population and the revenue.

But then, right now, God has given us the grace to be able to manage the allocation to such extent that from the time I took over office till now, we've been able to pay honorarium to teaching staff we owed over the years. This year, again, we're



MOUUAU News:

Thank you so much, Prof. What level of support are you getting from the University Management for this Center? I ask this because we know that finance have been very low to universities all over the country. But looking at some of the things you've done, it seems you are getting more money than any other Center or Directorate. What do you have to say?

Director CEC:

What we'll do each time, maybe quarter by quarter, we will estimate the number of students probably that have either graduated or paid their fees and all that. So we'll put up papers and make a requisition for 30% of what is left. So we're working with that.

Now, at some point, that amount was heavy, when, of course, you had quite a large number of student population patronizing the Center. Sometime ago, particularly when the Management courses were de-listed, a large percentage of the student population comes from the

almost getting done with paying the first semester 2024/2025.

When we came, quite a lot of debt portfolio was inherited. So what we do is, you know, take a little bit from what is in the present and go a little back. So that's what we're having so far, so good.

I want to say that the Vice-Chancellor has been very magnanimous in approving all those payments. So what we're



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We were determined to graduate our students. We were persistent in our quest to end bad publicity about CEC, and we are succeeding - *Prof. Ahamefule*

doing is, well, as money comes in, we look at those ones we can handle, we pay. That's what we've been doing. We have an idea of what the Center is owing and we've been defraying it bit by bit. Of course, the situation has changed from what it used to be before. Those claims about we're not being paid, no, no, those stories don't exist anymore.

MOUUAU News: Okay, that takes me to what I really had in mind before coming for this interview. You know, our job as PR Managers here is quite enormous. One of the things we do is to daily monitor all the news media, especially the radio stations in the State. I remember on one occasion, while I was monitoring one radio station, it seemed like the topic that day was the Center for Continuing Education, Michael Okpara University. There were so many phone calls of complaints against the Centre, mostly about missing results or delay in processing results. Some talked about a programme that should have taken them five years, took much more. These kind of report damage our reputation. How far so far?

Director CEC: Yes, to be very frank with you, I have a formidable group here now. They've been doing so much, you know, sacrificially to be able to keep this place at bay. Like I said, it is no longer the same story. What you heard, that's what we met on ground. We met a lot of cases of missing results. And what did we do? We identified the source of the problem as marking and handled it headlong.

It took quite some time, six months getting to one year. But then, you know, it was something we were very passionate about and were persistent. Over time, those results surfaced from nowhere. And lo and behold, most of those results were prepared and released, and the students, of course, had to graduate.

Now, those theories are things in the past. Now, we have run two make-up programmes, because we told ourselves the truth, that these students, for

whatever reason, who have a lot of backlogs in fees and in results and have not graduated, and are giving us bad publicity outside, should graduate. We had to bring all old and distressed students in from whatever they are to come and run make-up programmes. The programmes helped them to refresh and write exams and we succeeded.

We graduated over 700 of them. And the information went out, So the second time they came and that's what I've been doing. So that's what changed the narrative. So it is no longer about us, rather it is whether you are ready to graduate.

There is high demand to continue the make-up programmes. I don't know when the next one is going to be, but I can tell you that the number of those students out there who claim



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CEC will soon introduce short-term courses and certifications in various agric. programmes - *Prof. Ahamefule*

to have had a stint but could not graduate due to complicated issues had decreased tremendously. And of course, you know, and the information is also out there in the open, that we have found a way out of the problems, and people are now coming back to complete their programmes.

MOUAU News: That's lovely.

So what would be your message to the teeming population of young people and adults who might be looking for opportunity to either improve on their knowledge or get a certification in a particular course? I have a few friends that will call me and say, "Can we get a four-month training in a particular area and get a certificate that we can even use internationally?" What message will you be sending out to people who will be looking for opportunities to upgrade or do a programme in our University who are very busy people?

Director CEC:

Yes, now that you mentioned this, I want to tell you that soon the Center will be offering short certificate courses. What we will do is to midwife, but then the courses will be run by different Colleges, etc., just like a CEC programmes. So, we will offer opportunity for people to come for 4-6 months short courses and obtain certification, which can be recognized both nationally and internationally.

MOUAU News: Thank you, for your time, Director.

Director CEC:

Thank you, PRO.



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