

When Universities Must Earn Their Relevance: Industry Collaboration, Revenue Diversification, and the Governance Imperative for Nigerian Public Universities

*Being a paper presentation by Olufemi AWOYEMI, Founder and Chairman, Proshare Nigeria Limited on **“Leveraging Industry Collaboration and Partnership to Enhance University Internally Generated Revenue and Graduate Employability”** at the 15th Governing Council Retreat of Rivers State University (RSU), themed “A New Strategic Direction to Inspire and Reposition the Rivers State University for Excellence and Creativity”, held at Heliconia Park Hotel and Suites, Eastern Bypass, Off Ogbunabali, Amadi Ama, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, on 9 April 2026.*

Executive Summary

Nigeria’s public universities face a structural funding challenge that cannot be resolved by incremental increases in government subventions. The 15th Governing Council Retreat of Rivers State University convened at a moment of genuine institutional reckoning, examining how to reposition a public university for relevance, financial sustainability, and graduate quality in an economy that is rapidly outpacing the curriculum frameworks that govern it.

The paper argues that industry collaboration is not a supplementary strategy but a structural imperative, the only credible path by which Nigerian universities can simultaneously close their funding gap, close the graduate employability gap, and re-establish their social contract with the communities and economy they serve.

The paper addresses ten dimensions identified as critical to the completeness of the institutional argument. These include the value proposition of RSU specifically, the distinction between budget and financial autonomy, the revised strategic pillars, the role of the alumni association as strategic infrastructure, digital certification and training as a revenue and relevance mechanism, the town-gown execution framework and the integration of practising professionals in curriculum delivery, the challenge of digital universities and the changing definition of hybrid, the legal and regulatory bottlenecks that must be overcome, and the internal governance structures and self-limiting constraints that represent the most consequential barriers to transformation.

The institutional opportunity is real. The governance will and execution discipline to act on it are what this retreat was designed to build.

Context and Background

The 15th Governing Council Retreat of Rivers State University was convened between 8 and 11 April 2026 at Heliconia Park Hotel and Suites, Port Harcourt, under the theme “A New Strategic Direction to Inspire and Reposition the Rivers State University for Excellence

and Creativity.” The retreat brought together members of the Governing Council, senior university management, and invited resource persons to establish a shared strategic framework for the university’s next phase of development. The choice of an extended four-day residential retreat format reflects the Council’s recognition that incremental adjustments to existing practice are insufficient. What is required is a considered and deliberate reset of institutional direction.

Rivers State University, established in 1980 and located in Nkpolu Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, is one of the premier state universities in the South South geopolitical zone and carries both the institutional legacy and the contemporary obligations of a university serving a state whose economic identity is closely bound to the oil and gas industry. The retreat’s timing is significant. Nigeria’s energy transition conversation, the diversification imperative under successive government administrations, and the structural unemployment challenge facing graduates of tertiary institutions across the country all converge at an institution like RSU, making strategic recalibration not just advisable but urgent.

I am honoured to be invited by the Acting Registrar, Dr (Mrs) Idanyingi I. Daminabo, to serve as a Resource Person on the topic of *leveraging industry collaboration and partnership to enhance the university’s internally generated revenue and graduate employability*. This invitation, routed through Dr Uche Messiah Olowu, mni, a distinguished Member of the 15th Governing Council and 20th President of the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria (CIBN), is particularly pleasing. Rivers State was my first employment post outside Lagos State, in 1990, as a staff member of Coopers & Lybrand (*now PwC*).

I must record my regret that logistical constraints on the day of travel prevented me from being present in person for the full retreat. My participation was adjusted accordingly, and I remain committed to the substance of the engagement and to supporting RSU’s strategic ambitions through whatever channels are most useful to the Council going forward.

My Core Lecture Thesis

The central argument of the lecture is grounded in a structural observation rather than a prescriptive formula. Nigerian public universities were designed to operate as publicly funded institutions serving a developmental state that would provide adequate and growing subventions to support academic output, faculty development, infrastructure maintenance, and research investment.

That model has failed progressively over four decades. According to the National Universities Commission, federal funding per student in Nigerian public universities declined in real terms by more than 60% between 1990 and 2020, while enrolment expanded dramatically. The result is an institution type that is simultaneously under-resourced and over-enrolled, producing graduates whose competencies do not consistently meet the demands of the labour market they enter.

The thesis is therefore that *Nigerian universities must transition from publicly dependent institutions to hybrid value creators*. This transition does not mean abandoning the public funding relationship. It means the deliberate construction of an additional revenue architecture, grounded in industry collaboration, research commercialisation, continuing education, and institutional service delivery, that reduces the university's vulnerability to government funding volatility and simultaneously increases its economic and intellectual relevance to the society it serves. Industry collaboration is not a supplement to academic mission. It is, properly designed, the structural mechanism by which academic mission and institutional sustainability are made mutually reinforcing rather than competitively positioned.

The Value Proposition of Rivers State University

Before any strategic repositioning can be effectively designed, the institution must have a clear and honest understanding of what it uniquely offers to the industries, communities, and students it seeks to serve. RSU's value proposition is not generic. It is shaped by four specific and interrelated factors that distinguish it from most other state universities in Nigeria.

The *first* is geographic and sectoral proximity. Port Harcourt is the commercial capital of Nigeria's energy economy. RSU sits within a short distance of the headquarters, operational bases, and supply chain ecosystems of the oil and gas industry, the maritime and shipping sector, the petrochemical downstream, the agricultural processing belt of Rivers State, and an emerging technology services cluster. This proximity is not merely symbolic. It means that the industries RSU could most credibly serve are physically present in a way that allows for genuine partnership, not distant aspiration.

The *second* is faculty alignment. RSU's engineering, environmental science, sciences, and management faculties map directly onto the competency needs of the industries that define its host state. An institution with credible engineering capacity, located at the centre of Nigeria's energy industry, should not require external validation to be considered the preferred academic partner for that industry's research, training, and talent development needs. The gap between what RSUs could be for these industries and what they currently are represents both the diagnosis of the problem and the measure of the opportunity.

The *third* is institutional longevity and alumni depth. A university established in 1980 has produced graduates over four and a half decades who are now embedded at senior and mid-level roles across the public service, the energy industry, the professions, financial services, and the technology sector. That alumni base is a network of institutional relationships that most newer institutions cannot replicate. It is, as this paper will address in detail, a strategic asset that is being almost entirely wasted under current governance arrangements.

The *fourth* is the regulatory and policy environment of Rivers State itself. A state government with ambitions in economic diversification, local content, environmental

management, and industrial development has a direct interest in the research and training output of its premier university. That alignment between state development priorities and university capabilities is a value proposition in RSU's relationships with both government funding and industry partnerships that RSU has not yet fully articulated or exploited.

Taken together, these four factors constitute a value proposition that is specific, defensible, and differentiated. The work of institutional repositioning is converting that latent value proposition into an explicit, marketed, and operationally delivered reality.

Budget Autonomy and Financial Autonomy

A critical distinction that most conversations about Nigerian public university governance conflate is between budget autonomy and financial autonomy. Understanding this distinction is foundational to designing an effective institutional transformation strategy for RSU.

Budget autonomy is the administrative freedom to determine how an allocated subvention is deployed internally. It is the ability to shift resources between budget lines, to prioritise capital over recurrent expenditure within an approved budget, and to manage the timing of expenditure within a fiscal year without returning to the government at every decision point. Most Nigerian state universities have varying degrees of budget autonomy, often constrained.

The Rivers State Government and its budgetary approval processes influence how RSU spends its allocation, and the procurement rules, financial regulations, and auditing requirements that govern public institutions create a framework fundamentally designed for accountability to a funding principal rather than for the agility of a commercially active institution.

Financial autonomy is a structurally different condition. It is the capacity to generate, retain, and strategically deploy independently earned revenue without the constraints that apply to government-transferred funds. A financially autonomous university can price its programmes at market rates, retain surpluses for investment in institutional capability, enter into commercial contracts at the speed required by industry relationships, establish subsidiaries or joint ventures with industry partners, and manage its treasury to generate investment income alongside programme revenue. Financial autonomy is what makes the hybrid value creator model viable. Budget autonomy alone does not.

RSU's current position is one of constrained budget autonomy and negligible financial autonomy.

The Rivers State University Law, the financial regulations governing public institutions in Rivers State, and the broader framework of the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act create a legal and regulatory architecture that was designed for grant-dependent

institutions. That architecture must change if RSU is to function as the commercially active and industry-engaged institution that this paper advocates.

The Governing Council must therefore engage the Rivers State Government on a specific legislative and regulatory agenda. That agenda should include amendments to the Rivers State University Law to permit the establishment of commercial subsidiaries and the retention of revenue generated from commercial activities outside the Consolidated Revenue Fund framework. It should include revised financial regulations that allow RSU to manage commercially generated funds with the speed and flexibility that commercial relationships require, procurement rules that distinguish between procurement for public expenditure and procurement for commercially contracted activities, and governance provisions that vest intellectual property generated through industry-funded research in RSU, with clear frameworks for licensing, revenue sharing, and protection.

The sequencing of this legislative agenda matters. The Council cannot wait for full legal reform before beginning the transformation journey. What it can do is structure its initial commercial activities within the existing legal framework while simultaneously pursuing legislative changes to remove constraints on scale and sustainability. This dual-track approach, operating within current constraints while working to change them, is the disciplined and realistic path.

Key Strategic Pillars

I have identified seven (7) strategic pillars for institutional transformation. The pillars are not independent initiatives. They are interdependent components of a single institutional redesign whose effectiveness depends on the coherence with which they are pursued together.

1. Revenue Diversification Beyond Government Subvention

The internally generated revenue potential of a well-positioned university is substantially greater than that realised by most Nigerian public institutions. Continuing and professional education programmes, executive development offerings, facility rentals, consultancy services, and technology licensing all represent revenue streams available to institutions prepared to invest in the governance structures and commercial capabilities required to deliver them. RSU, located in Port Harcourt with proximity to the oil and gas industry, the maritime sector, and an increasingly diversified services economy, has a natural catchment for professional education and industry training programmes that remains largely untapped.

The first strategic pillar is the creation of a dedicated, commercially oriented unit with clear performance mandates, reporting lines, and incentive structures to develop and manage these revenue streams with the discipline of a commercial enterprise rather than the habits of a public bureaucracy. This unit must be staffed with professionals experienced in commercial operations, programme marketing, and industry relationship management. It

must operate within a budget, a business plan, and performance targets, which are reviewed by the Governing Council quarterly.

2. Industry-Funded Research and Commercialisation

Nigerian industry, particularly the energy sector that anchors Rivers State's economic base, consistently encounters research and development needs that external consultants address at high cost. Universities capable of delivering credible applied research, with appropriate intellectual property frameworks and confidentiality protocols, represent a more cost-effective and strategically aligned option for many of these needs. The challenge is that most Nigerian universities have not built the institutional infrastructure, contract research framework, technology transfer office, or faculty incentive structures required to make this proposition viable for an industry partner.

Building that infrastructure is a governance investment that generates revenue returns over a three to five-year horizon. The second pillar is the establishment of a Research and Innovation Commercialisation Office with a mandate to identify industry research needs, package RSU's research capability in commercially legible terms, manage the contractual and intellectual property dimensions of industry-funded research engagements, and develop the pipeline of faculty researchers who are positioned and motivated to engage with industry on applied research terms.

3. Curriculum Alignment and the Town-Gown Execution Framework

The graduate employability gap in Nigeria is well-documented. The National Bureau of Statistics labour force surveys consistently show youth unemployment rates disproportionate to the volume of tertiary graduates being produced. A significant portion of this gap is attributable not to a lack of demand for educated workers but to a mismatch between the competencies graduates possess and those employers require. Curriculum design in Nigerian public universities remains, in many faculties, disconnected from industry practice, not from academic negligence but from structural isolation. Industry does not systematically participate in curriculum development, and universities do not systematically seek that participation.

Correcting this requires more than the formalisation of Industry Advisory Boards at the faculty level, though that formalisation is necessary. It requires the operationalisation of a town-gown execution framework that moves the relationship between RSU and the Port Harcourt industrial and business community from occasional and informal to structural and sustained. The town-gown framework, as properly executed, has three operational dimensions.

The *first* is curriculum co-design, in which industry advisory boards with genuine decision-making influence review and reshape curriculum content on an annual cycle, identifying competency gaps and mandating practical assessment components that test applied capability rather than memorised content.

The *second* is practitioner faculty integration, in which senior professionals from the oil and gas, maritime, financial services, and technology sectors are embedded in curriculum delivery on structured, contractually defined, and academically supervised terms. This is not a guest lecture arrangement. It is a co-delivery model in which practising professionals teach specialist modules within degree programmes, bringing current industry practice into the classroom in a form that is academically credible, regularly updated, and formally assessed.

The *third* dimension is structured work-based learning, in which the Student Industrial (IT) Work Experience Scheme is redesigned from a compliance exercise into a genuine learning experience with structured learning objectives, employer performance assessment, and university monitoring protocols that make the placement period substantively developmental.

Proshare's own experience with graduate interns and research associates confirms that structured engagement with clear learning objectives produces materially better professional development outcomes than unstructured placement. The third strategic pillar is therefore a formally governed and institutionally resourced town-gown execution framework that is managed as a strategic function rather than administered as a procedural obligation.

4. The Alumni Association as Strategic Infrastructure

The most underutilised asset in RSU's revenue and employability strategy is its alumni network, and the underutilisation is structural rather than accidental. Most Nigerian university alumni associations operate as social and ceremonial bodies. They organise homecoming events, present plaques, and occasionally donate physical infrastructure. What they rarely do is function as a systematic resource for the institution's financial sustainability, curriculum relevance, or graduate placement capacity.

That gap represents a significant missed opportunity, particularly for a university like RSU with four and a half decades of graduates embedded across the oil and gas industry, the public service, financial services, engineering, medicine, and the professions. RSU alumni include leaders in the industries the university most needs as partners. They are, in principle, the most credible endorsers of RSU's quality to the labour market, the most accessible pathway to industry advisory board membership, the most natural mentors for current students, and the most motivated potential investors in the institution's commercial ventures.

Converting this potential into institutional value requires three simultaneous actions. The alumni database must be built and maintained as a living institutional asset, segmented by sector, seniority, employer, and geography, and updated on a regular cycle. The alumni relationship must be repositioned from a giving relationship to a partnership relationship. Alumni who are asked only for donations will give selectively and sporadically. Alumni who are offered structured roles as mentors, guest faculty, internship supervisors, industry advisory board members, and recruitment partners will engage continuously and become

institutional assets of sustained value. And the Governing Council must treat alumni engagement as a strategic function with dedicated staffing, a performance framework, and executive accountability.

An Alumni Relations Office that reports directly to the Vice Chancellor, with clear annual targets for engagement levels, industry partnerships activated, placement rates achieved, and revenue generated through alumni networks, is a different proposition from an alumni secretariat that processes membership fees.

The alumni association, properly governed and strategically oriented, is simultaneously a revenue pipeline, an employability infrastructure, a curriculum advisory resource, and a living endorsement of the institution's quality to the wider world. Its current condition in most Nigerian public universities is a governance failure, not a resource failure. The fourth strategic pillar is the structural transformation of the RSU Alumni Association from a social body into a strategic institutional asset.

5. Governance Discipline and Accountability

The transformation of a public university's revenue architecture and industry engagement capability is, at its core, a governance challenge. Revenue diversification initiatives that are not governed by clear performance frameworks, transparent financial reporting, and accountable leadership structures will be captured by institutional inertia or redirected to non-strategic purposes. Governing Councils of Nigerian public universities bear constitutional and statutory responsibilities under the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act and the enabling laws of each state, both of which are significant and frequently underappreciated. The Council is not a ceremonial body. It is the primary accountability mechanism for the institution's strategic direction, financial integrity, and executive performance.

A key pillar, therefore, is strengthening the Governing Council's governance capacity, including developing a strategic performance scorecard against which management is assessed regularly and rigorously.

6. The Role of Technology and Innovation Ecosystems

Digital infrastructure and technology adoption represent both a cost-management opportunity and a revenue-generation platform for universities willing to invest strategically. Online and hybrid programme delivery extends institutional reach beyond the physical campus and into markets that residential programmes cannot serve. Technology-enabled administrative systems reduce the cost of student services, financial management, and compliance reporting. Innovation and technology incubators hosted within universities create an economic ecosystem around the institution that generates both intellectual property and employment, and positions the university as an active participant in the regional economic development agenda rather than a passive recipient of state subvention. Rivers State University's proximity to Port Harcourt's emerging technology ecosystem makes this pillar particularly relevant to its specific institutional context.

7. Digital Certification, Digital Training, and the Evolving Definition of Hybrid

The seventh strategic pillar addresses two closely related phenomena that are reshaping the global higher education landscape and are directly relevant to RSU's competitive positioning and revenue opportunities.

The *first* is the emergence of digital certification and training as a distinct, rapidly growing segment of the education market. The *second* is the evolving definition of hybrid learning and the competitive threat posed by digital universities.

Industry-recognised digital credentials in areas such as data analytics, energy management systems, environmental compliance, project management, supply chain management, health, safety and environment, and financial modelling occupy a market segment that RSU can serve without the regulatory friction and programme development timelines associated with full degree programmes. These credentials are sought by working professionals seeking to update their competencies, by employers seeking cost-effective workforce development solutions, and, increasingly, by international participants in the regions where RSU's subject-matter expertise is most relevant.

The development and delivery of short, certificated, digitally delivered programmes in these areas is a revenue opportunity that can be activated relatively quickly, that aligns with RSU's existing faculty expertise, and that simultaneously serves the continuing professional development market, updates the competency base of existing RSU graduates, and builds the institution's visibility with the industry partners it is seeking to engage.

The relationship between digital certification and the evolving definition of hybrid learning warrants explicit attention, as the two phenomena interact in ways that create both competitive threats and strategic opportunities. Hybrid learning, in its original Nigerian higher education context, referred to a combination of face-to-face and distance learning elements delivered within a degree programme framework. In the post-2020 global context, hybrid has acquired an additional meaning: the simultaneous delivery of content to both in-person and remote participants within a single real-time teaching session. These are different models with varying infrastructure requirements, pedagogical challenges, and implications for student experience.

RSU must be deliberate about which definition of hybrid it is designing for, because the infrastructure and capability investments required for each differ substantially.

The broader competitive challenge is the growth of digital universities that operate entirely online, without a physical campus presence, and increasingly compete in the professional and executive education market. Some of these institutions hold international accreditation, offer globally recognised credentials, and deliver high-quality programmes at price points that are competitive with those of Nigerian state universities' professional development offerings.

RSU cannot match these institutions on digital infrastructure in the short term, but it can differentiate on the dimensions that digital-only institutions cannot easily replicate: physical proximity to the industries of the South-South economy, practitioner faculty networks, hands-on laboratory and field experience, and the social and professional network that a residential learning experience provides. The seventh pillar is therefore a digital programme development strategy that is disciplined about which market segments RSU can credibly and profitably serve through digital delivery, and equally disciplined about which segments are best served through the physical and relational dimensions that make a campus-based institution distinctive.

Institutional Gaps Identified

1. Funding Inefficiency and the Subvention Trap

The combination of inadequate government subvention and limited internally generated revenue has created a chronic resource constraint at RSU and across Nigerian public universities, forcing short-term operational decisions at the expense of strategic investment. The recurrent budget consumes the overwhelming majority of available resources, leaving insufficient capital for infrastructure maintenance, faculty development, technology investment, or the institutional capacity building that a transformation agenda requires. This is not simply a funding problem. It is a strategic trap in which the institution spends all its available resources on sustaining current operations, leaving nothing to invest in building the capabilities that would enable it to generate additional resources. Breaking out of this trap requires a sequenced investment plan that allocates a defined portion of current resources to capability building, even at the cost of short-term operational constraints.

2. Weak Industry Linkages

Most Nigerian public universities, including RSU, have not built the relational infrastructure, the commercial protocols, or the institutional credibility required to position themselves as preferred partners for industry research, training, or talent development. The relationships that do exist are typically personal rather than institutional, dependent on individual faculty members' industry connections rather than on structured university-level engagement mechanisms. When those individuals leave or retire, the relationships disappear with them. The required transformation is the institutionalisation of industry relationships through formal partnership agreements, joint governance structures, and commercial contracts that endure personnel changes on both sides.

3. Graduate Unemployability Mismatch

The graduate unemployability mismatch is a product of curriculum design lag, inadequate practical training infrastructure, the absence of systematic employer feedback loops in academic quality assurance processes, and the structural isolation of curriculum development from industry practice described above. It is also a function of a graduate assessment system that rewards the ability to reproduce knowledge in examination conditions rather than the ability to apply knowledge in professional contexts. Addressing

this gap requires curriculum reform, assessment reform, and the infrastructure investments in laboratories, simulation facilities, and digital learning environments that make practical learning possible.

4. Legal and Regulatory Bottlenecks

The legal and regulatory architecture governing Nigerian public universities was designed for institutions that receive government grants and spend them in accordance with government financial regulations. It was not designed for commercially active hybrid entities that generate revenue from multiple independent sources, enter into commercial contracts with private sector partners, establish commercial subsidiaries, and manage intellectual property with commercial value. The specific legal and regulatory bottlenecks that impede RSU's transformation include restrictions on commercial subsidiary establishment, limitations on retaining non-subvention revenue outside government fund frameworks, procurement rules that are incompatible with the speed of commercial contracting, intellectual property ownership provisions that do not clearly vest commercial IP in the university, and employment regulations that limit the university's ability to attract and retain commercially skilled professionals at market rates. Each of these bottlenecks requires a specific legislative or regulatory intervention, and the Governing Council must drive the agenda for those interventions with the Rivers State Government and, where relevant, with the Federal Government and the National Universities Commission.

5. Internal Governance Structure and Self-Limiting Constraints

The most consequential barriers to RSU's institutional transformation are internal rather than external. They are embedded in the governance structures, management systems, and organisational culture that have developed over decades of operating as a publicly funded institution. These internal constraints include a remuneration and incentive structure for academic staff that does not reward commercially productive research, industry engagement, or entrepreneurial activity. A faculty member who secures a major industry research contract for the university is rewarded the same as a faculty member with no external engagement. Until that incentive structure changes, the behaviour it produces will continue.

The procurement and financial management systems present a second category of self-limiting constraint. These systems were designed to ensure accountability for public funds, but they operate at a pace fundamentally incompatible with the speed required in commercial relationships. An industry partner that needs a research contract turned around in two weeks will not wait six months for a university procurement committee to complete its process. Until RSU has a separate commercial contracting pathway with appropriate governance but commercial speed, its ability to compete for industry partnerships will be structurally limited, regardless of the quality of its research capability.

A third category is decision-making architecture. Strategic decisions at most Nigerian public universities require multiple layers of approval, committee review, and regulatory clearance. This architecture is appropriate for decisions with significant governance implications, but it is applied with equal rigour to operational decisions that a commercially

active institution would handle at the management level. The result is an institution that is slow to respond, risk-averse by design, and incapable of the operational agility required by industry partnerships. The Governing Council must commission a governance audit to identify the specific decision categories in which authority can be safely delegated to the management level without compromising institutional accountability, and implement the resulting changes within defined timelines.

A fourth internal constraint is the culture of compliance over performance that characterises most Nigerian public institutions. Years of audit-focused governance have embedded a management culture in which avoiding audit findings is treated as the primary objective of institutional management. This culture is the enemy of innovation, commercial risk-taking, and the experimental approach that building new revenue streams inevitably requires. The Governing Council's role is to signal clearly, through its own conduct and its management accountability framework, that measured risk-taking in the pursuit of institutional transformation is not only permitted but expected.

Recommendations and Forward Path

The recommendations that follow are sequenced for implementation rather than presented as a comprehensive, simultaneous agenda, because institutional transformation that attempts too much at once typically achieves too little. The sequencing reflects the dependencies between workstreams and the governance disciplines required to sustain momentum over a multi-year transformation horizon.

Immediate Term Within Ninety Days

The Governing Council should commission three parallel workstreams immediately.

First, an independent assessment of RSU's existing internally generated revenue streams, identifying both the quantum of current revenue and the structural gaps in the commercial, contractual, and governance frameworks that limit further growth.

Second, a legal audit of the specific constraints in the Rivers State University Law, the applicable financial regulations, and the Universities (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act that impede commercial activity, with a recommended legislative and regulatory reform agenda.

Third, a governance audit of RSU's internal decision-making structures, incentive systems, and management accountability frameworks, with specific recommendations for the changes required to enable commercial agility without compromising institutional accountability.

Concurrently, management should produce an inventory of existing and latent industry relationships, and the Alumni Relations function should begin the database reconstruction work that underpins every other alumni strategy.

Near Term Six to Twelve Months

The university should establish the commercially oriented revenue unit and constitute it with professionally qualified staff on terms that are competitive with market salaries. Faculty-level Industry Advisory Boards should be constituted beginning with Engineering, Sciences, Environmental Sciences, and Management Sciences.

The first two digital certification programmes should be designed, validated by industry partners, and prepared for launch, targeting the oil and gas and maritime professional development markets. The Practitioner Faculty programme framework should be formally adopted, and the first cohort of practising professionals recruited and integrated into curriculum delivery. The Alumni Relations Office should be operationalised with a full-time head, a performance framework, and annual targets approved by the Vice Chancellor. The legal reform agenda should be formally tabled with the Rivers State Government.

Medium Term Twelve to Thirty-Six Months

The Research and Innovation Commercialisation Office should be fully operational with at least two active industry research contracts. The digital certification programme portfolio should be expanded to four to six programmes with measurable enrolment and revenue performance.

A formal Employability and Careers Service should be operationalised and connected to a tracked graduate outcomes framework measuring employment rates, employer satisfaction, and salary benchmarks at six and twelve months post-graduation.

The town-gown execution framework should be formalised through signed partnership agreements with at least five major industry partners. The legislative reforms required for financial autonomy should be at a defined stage of the enactment process, with a clear timetable for completion.

Throughout this sequence, the Governing Council must function as the accountability anchor. Strategic initiatives that are not subject to regular Council review, performance measurement, and course correction intervention will dissipate. The Council's most important governance action is not the approval of plans but the systematic review of whether approved plans are being implemented with the quality and discipline that the institution's ambition requires.

Observations from the Engagement

Based on the interactions preceding and surrounding the retreat, the Governing Council of Rivers State University presents itself as a body genuinely engaged with the challenge of institutional repositioning rather than merely performing strategic intent. The invitation to external resource persons on substantive governance and commercial topics, rather than limiting the retreat to internal management presentations, signals an openness to external perspectives that is not universal among Nigerian public university governing bodies. The

choice of theme, a new strategic direction rather than a refinement of existing direction, reflects an honest acknowledgement that incremental adjustment is insufficient.

The level of alignment between Council members on the urgency of change appears to be substantive. The more nuanced question, one that retreats can frame but only implementation will answer, is whether that alignment extends to the appetite for the governance discipline and management accountability that transformation requires.

The history of strategic planning in Nigerian public institutions suggests that the gap between well-designed strategic frameworks and their implementation is most often a leadership and accountability gap rather than a resource or knowledge gap. RSU's Council has the composition and the evident seriousness to bridge that gap, provided it maintains the review and accountability disciplines over a sustained period.

Conclusion

The transformation of Rivers State University into an institution that is financially sustainable, academically relevant, and a consistent producer of employable graduates is not a conceptual challenge. The strategic framework for that transformation is well understood, internationally documented, and domestically demonstrated in the limited but instructive examples of Nigerian universities that have built credible industry partnerships and diversified revenue architectures. It is a governance and execution challenge.

The Governing Council holds the primary accountability for ensuring that the strategic direction agreed at this retreat is translated into implementation plans, resourced with adequate management attention and financial investment, and reviewed with the rigour that the institution's mission and its students' futures deserve.

The data assembled to inform the submissions in this paper tell a story beyond institutional dispute. Nigeria's education budget as a share of national expenditure has fallen from 10.75% in 2015 to 5.47% in 2025. No Nigerian university appears in the *Times Higher Education top 800 rankings*. The formal economy absorbs less than 15% of its graduates into paid employment. Rivers State, meanwhile, generates N203.56 billion in internally generated revenue annually, hosts industries that produce over 60% of Nigeria's crude oil, and sits adjacent to a USD 10 billion LNG facility. The gap between what RSU could be to this economy and what it currently is represents the full measure of the opportunity before this Governing Council.

Rivers State University has lived through its years of formation, growth, difficulty, and endurance. Every institution that survives across multiple economic cycles accumulates both the scars of adversity and the substance of reputation.

Rivers State University has the institutional heritage, the geographic positioning, the alumni depth, the faculty capability, and, from the evidence of this retreat, the governance

will to become a model for institutional renewal among Nigerian state universities. The external environment is more favourable to this transformation than at any previous moment in the university's history. Nigeria's economic diversification agenda, the energy transition, the digital economy's demand for technically skilled graduates, and the growing appetite of Nigerian industry for locally sourced applied research all point in the same direction. The opportunity is real and available. The only variable is whether RSU governs itself with the discipline required to seize it.

Proshare's work in capital markets intelligence, institutional governance analysis, and policy research has consistently demonstrated that the gap between institutional aspiration and institutional performance is a function of governance quality more than any other single variable. Universities, listed companies, development finance institutions, and regulatory bodies earn their relevance through demonstrated performance against publicly stated and independently assessed commitments. The invitation to contribute to RSU's strategic conversation is one that this office received with gratitude and will continue to support.

The 15th Governing Council has assembled not to celebrate the past but to govern the future. That is the right instinct. The quality of what follows from this retreat will determine whether it was also the right leadership at this time.

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