

Student takes her computer coding skills to Africa to 'raise an army of intellectuals'

● Sofiat 'bridging the gap' with workshops

By SHÂN ROSS

A student at a Scottish university says her ambition is to "raise an army of intellectuals" to empower fellow students drive innovative research in African countries.

Sofiat Olaosebikan, a PhD computing science student at the University of Glasgow, has been running computer programming workshops at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and at the University of Rwanda, helped by her PhD researchers and teaching assistants from the university.

Ms Olaosebikan's first workshop in Python computer programming in Nigeria attracted more than 100 undergraduate and postgraduates and has already seen one of those students, John Paul, get a job in a software company where he aims to design an app to help detect breast cancer.

The number of students completing the workshops has since doubled to 200.

Ms Olaosebikan, who completed her undergraduate studies in pure mathematics at the University of Ibadan, said she wants to use her skills to help African students "bridge the gap between their pre-existing knowledge and real-world scientific problems.

"There are lots of problems in Africa that need to be solved. My goal is to raise an army of intellectuals that are going to contribute to the development of Africa."

Empowering young scientists in Africa "will help them grow to become innovative thinkers who will push Africa forward on the frontiers of science and technology. I am a good example of one such African scientist who was empowered by the opportunities I have been given. This initiative was born out of a strong desire to give back to the community by helping other young scientists in Africa and show them what is possible."

Her Programming Workshop for Scientists in Africa (PWSAfrica) has attracted students travelling long distances for the opportunity to learn computer programming, which uses a special language





COMMENT

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called code. Ifeoma Okoh and Mr Paul took part in the Nigerian workshop in 2018, and this year returned to PWSAfrica as tutors in Rwanda.

Ms Okoh said: “Sofiat has brought so much empowerment to us from the UK to Nigeria. We have so much potential in Nigeria but sometimes it is the opportunity to actually show that which is missing.”

Mr Paul said: “Sofiat is awesome and is such an inspiration. I want to be just like Sofiat.”

Professor Chris Johnson, head of Glasgow’s School of Computing Science, said he is fully supportive of PWSAfrica and the work being carried out by his students and colleagues: “The university is not an inward-looking institution. It shouldn’t be just about the campus or the building you are based in. It should be about your ability to get out, to influence how people think and how people learn in different countries.”

“With all the pressures that exist today in university life to

bring in research grants and to teach increasingly larger numbers of students, it is absolutely fantastic when a few people do something different and challenge preconceptions and go out and do something that I think is important.”

PWSAfrica workshops are funded by the university’s Chancellor’s Fund, the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Scottish Funding Council.

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