

**OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR**



**INAUGURATION OF THE WEST AFRICAN GENETIC MEDICINE CENTRE  
(WAGMC)**

**ADDRESS BY:**

**PROFESSOR NANA ABA APPIAH AMFO  
VICE - CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**FRI. NOV. 8, 2024**

**WAGMC  
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

*Honourable Minister for Education and Special Guest of Honour Dr.*

*Yaw Osei Adutwum*

*Pro Vice-Chancellors*

*Registrar*

*Provost, College of Health Sciences, Prof. Alfred E. Yawson.*

*Founding Director of West African Genetic Medicine Centre, Prof. S.*

*Fiifi Ofori-Aquah*

*Representatives from the World Bank Group, Association of African*

*Universities and Ghana Tertiary Education Commission*

*Deans, Directors, Heads of Department*

*Faculty, Staff and Students,*

*Specially Invited Guests*

*The Press*

*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen*

Sometime back in July 2022, I performed the sod cutting ceremony to commence construction of this magnificent edifice. I am therefore filled with excitement to be back here today for the commissioning of the West African Genetic Medicine Centre (WAGMC) building complex.

The West African Genetic Medicine Centre (WAGMC) is an Africa Higher Education Centre of Excellence (ACE) in the College of Health Sciences, University of Ghana (UG). In response to a call by the World Bank for the establishment of African Centres of Excellence (ACE) Impact projects, Professor S. Fiifi Ofori-Acquah, the former Dean of the School of Biomedical and Allied Health Sciences (SBAHS) in collaboration with faculty of SBAHS and the University of Ghana Medical School, proposed the establishment of an ACE with a focus on genetic disorders such as Sickle Cell Disease and other common genetic diseases.

Here we are today witnessing not just the inauguration of the building of another research centre on Legon campus. Through this, we also celebrate the impact WAGMC is already making. The building which was completed in May 2024 was inspected by the World Bank in June. The \$1.5 million WAGMC building complex offers a 2,800 square meter working space including 220 square meter open laboratory, 200-seater auditorium, a biorepository, multiple smart classrooms, a genetic counselling clinic, a graduate room, a boardroom, and administrative and faculty offices. These are all fitted with contemporary equipment to serve faculty, staff and students to enhance learning and research. The completion of

the building is a major milestone towards the accomplishment of the Centre's goal of becoming a global hub for genomics training and research in Africa.

On this note, I would like to acknowledge Professor S. Fiifi Ofori-Acquah, and the hardworking team behind this project right from conceptualization till completion for a good work done.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, WAGMC's operations cover three core areas: development of postgraduate programmes, research in genetics and community engagement. WAGMC developed and offers the first and only MSc Genetic Counselling programme in Sub-Saharan Africa since 2021. The programme provides in-depth genetics knowledge and communication skills for patient care. In addition to the genetic counselling programme, the Centre has also developed MPhil and PhD programmes in Medical Molecular Genetics, which have been reviewed and approved at the university level and currently undergoing accreditation at the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission.

WAGMC also offers short courses to provide continuous professional development to healthcare practitioners in genetics. This includes Genetic Education and Counselling for Sickle Cell Conditions and the Allied Health Genomics.

In the area of research, WAGMC is home to the SickGenAfrica Network, a flagship Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) project and the largest SCD cohort study globally, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Other projects include Ghana-SPARCO, a collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh to sequence genomes of children with SCD. Additionally, the Centre runs an industry-funded pilot project exploring the ethics of gene-based cures and patient immune responses to viral treatments for SCD.

Since its inception, WAGMC has demonstrated commitment to improving access to genetic health in Ghana through community engagement. In 2020, the Centre provided free genetic testing and screening for over 2,000 people in the Eastern Region of Ghana in collaboration with the Okyenhene Osagyefuo Nana Amoatia Ofori Panin. The Centre has, since 2022, expanded its free genetic screening and testing coverage nationwide under the Ghanaian Genome (GhGenome) project in collaboration with several other traditional rulers in the Greater Accra, Central, Ashanti, Volta and Upper East Regions of Ghana. The Centre's community engagement activities will continue to serve and impact the country for years to come.

As a university with the vision *to achieve global impact through innovative research, teaching and learning, using a technology driven and people-centred approach*, the University of Ghana is proud of the niche WAGMC is creating for itself as beacon of excellence in the study of genomics not only in Ghana but within the sub-region.

At its core, this research centre embodies our university's commitment to advancing cutting-edge knowledge and solving the challenges of our time. This is a space where curiosity will be nurtured, questions will be asked, and answers will be found. It is a space where bold ideas will take root and grow into solutions that will have real-world impact

The completion of this project is testament to the power of engagement and partnership and will contribute tremendously to the realization of the University's strategic priorities particularly SP1: Transformative Student Experience, SP2: Impactful Research, SP4: Engagement and Partnerships.

Before I take my seat, I would like to express Management's profound gratitude to the World Bank and other partner institutions for providing funding and other support to set up and

operationalize WAGMC. Thank you for your belief in the power of research and your commitment to our shared vision.

To the researchers, staff and students of WAGMC, you are the heart and soul of this Centre. It is your curiosity, resilience and drive that will define the legacy of this space.

As we look ahead, I am filled with excitement about the impact that awaits us. Together, let us make WAGMC not only a hub of academic excellence but also a beacon of hope, innovation, and positive change for the world.

Thank you.

**Prof. Nana Aba Appiah Amfo**

**Vice-Chancellor**

**(November 8, 2024)**