

**Graduation address:**  
**Mike Eldon, Chairman of KCA University Council**  
**11<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

What does it feel like to be graduating from a university whose students have been identified as among the most employable in Kenya?

I ask because as many of you are aware, less than two months ago a report was published by the British Council about a study that was carried out from March 2013 to February 2016 by the Department of Education of University College London on the employability of graduates of universities in Kenya and in three other African countries. We at KCA University were not altogether surprised to learn from it that, together with Strathmore, our students were rated ahead of those from any other private university in Kenya, and fourth overall in the country.

Having graduated from University College London half a century ago next year, I take what its folk say seriously. So you can imagine how proud we were to learn of its findings – proud both of our faculty and other staff, and of our students. For while we know how committed and dynamic our people at KCA University are, it is also everything to do with the kind of students we attract and nurture. I also know that our Chancellor, our Council, our Trustees and the ICPAK Council have earned a share of the credit too.

So I ask again, how are you feeling about graduating from a place whose students are among the most employable? Let me speculate:

- Are you nodding smugly, having already got yourself a job?
- Are you waving the thought away casually, having launched your own business?
- Are you indifferent for now, as you will be continuing with further studies?
- And if you are indeed job hunting, are you doing so with optimism and confidence? Or anxious that you won't be among the "lucky" ones?

Did I say lucky? Many are fully convinced that this business of finding work after one's studies *is* a matter of luck, including and not least being lucky enough to have people around you who "know people". Too many are unfamiliar with the saying that luck is "the crossroads between opportunity and preparation". (As Hillary Clinton showed... but for bad luck of course!)

We at KCA certainly do understand how to increase people's chances of being "lucky", and we hope we have helped you to be well prepared, and to have stimulated you to identify opportunities for yourselves, as mature young adults.

Is it because we are a grand old institution that we have been able to do so? No, for we are not. Is it because we have attracted energetic, talented and dedicated faculty? Definitely yes. And are we working hard at strengthening them further and making them ever more effective in stimulating and stretching you and your successors? Yes again.

Is it thanks to a healthy culture, one that is ethical and respectful, and assumes open communication and constructive engagement aimed at capitalising on opportunities and finding solutions to challenges? You bet!

This, as I never tire of affirming, applies all the way from the students and the Student Council; to the faculty and its management; to the university's Chancellor and Council and Trustees and the Council of ICPAK.

Oh and being human, another aspect of our culture is admitting our mistakes when we make them. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission would be proud of us; so would Mr. Kaparo and his National Cohesion and Integration Commission; and we receive feedback that the Commission for University Education wishes more universities were like us.

Surely these are the reasons why so many top universities around the world are beating a path to KCA seeking partnerships with us, from Israel to Japan, from Denmark to South Africa. It is also why we work so well with the leaders of our National and County Governments, the latter together with the Chamber of Commerce; and why more and more corporates are enjoying interacting with us. Let me tell you, there are no ivory towers at KCA.

But I don't for a moment want you to think we are complacent. On the contrary, the stronger we get the more ambitious we become. Indeed we have never been more ambitious, to keep raising our game and to unambiguously become the leading tertiary education institute in this part of the world. Almost every college and university talks about being "world class" and "a centre of excellence" and all those clichés. Well we are serious about it, and we are serious about being judged by the quality of the students who graduate from here.

So this graduation day is to honour and celebrate you, as you launch into the next stage of your lives. You have behaved responsibly and maturely while you were with us, making the best of your time here and making it a pleasure for us to be with you. The good habits you came with and that have been reinforced go with you, as do all the knowledge and skills and attitudes you have absorbed.

We wish you well, knowing you will take with you great memories of your transformative days at KCA University. We also know that as alumni you will want to stay close to us, allowing us to continue helping you with your development while you in turn act as our ambassadors. In short, we look forward to a strong and mutually beneficial partnership. Go forth with confidence and optimism – we remain behind you.

I cannot close without referring to our chief guest today, the Kenyan on whom we are bestowing an honorary degree. What can I say about Ngugi wa Thiong'o, whose book *A Grain of Wheat* appeared in 1967, the year I graduated from university the way you are doing today? And what can I say about the man who on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1977 was locked up at Kamiti Prison, shortly after the appearance of *Petals of Blood* – and just three months after I arrived in Kenya?

Having got to know him and his wife Njeeri in the last few days, I can only say they became like instant old friends, jolly characters with whom one can talk seriously and joke playfully all at once. They are the very best of Kenya, and we are so so happy to be the first university in this country to honour Ngugi as we are doing and to have him and Njeeri be with us.

Let me end with a quote from Ngugi's 1982 novel, *Devil on the Cross*:

“Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it and those committed to breaking it up; those who aim to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow [...] and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes.”

It is such thoughts that make us welcome Ngugi wa Thiongo with open arms, given that at KCA we are among those who are “pledged to confirm our humanity”, among those who make people “see the light and look to tomorrow”.

For all who are gathered here today, in front of me as well as behind me, let these words guide us in the days and months and years ahead.