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SPECIAL REPORT

Anxiety over delay of Universities Bill

Some higher learning institutions stand on shaky foundations, owing their existence to gazette notices that can be revoked suddenly. A Bill seeking to improve the situation is, however, thought to be taking too long to process

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There is mounting uncertainty concerning the status of some university constituent colleges. It is caused by the delay to make into law the Universities Bill 2012, and a forthcoming general election.

Most affected are public university constituent colleges, which owe their status to gazette notices issued by the president.

Such notices can be revoked any time. For instance, a change of regime could spell such a move should the new team see things differently.

Moreover, under the present laws guiding higher learning, university constituent colleges, though run autonomously, are not body corporates. They can hardly do much on their own other than serve as platforms for the delivery of degree programmes of the parent university.

The pending Universities Bill seeks to change these. If passed into law, it will grant university constituent colleges the legal status to exist as corporate entities.

It is the reason stake holders are jittery over the time it is taking to process the Bill into law.

Earlier, higher education minister, Prof Margaret Kamar, had given the assurance that the government was planning to charter 12 of the 25 university colleges once the bill became law.

"We are fast-tracking this Bill and once we have passed this stage and we have the law, we will be able to start the process of chartering the 12 university colleges to full universities as of the beginning of August to September this year," she had said.

But with last week's adjournment of Parliament, the chance of the Bill being passed into law by the end of July as previously anticipated by Prof Kamar's ministry is gone.

The university colleges that had been lined-up for upgrading, according to the minister, included Kisii

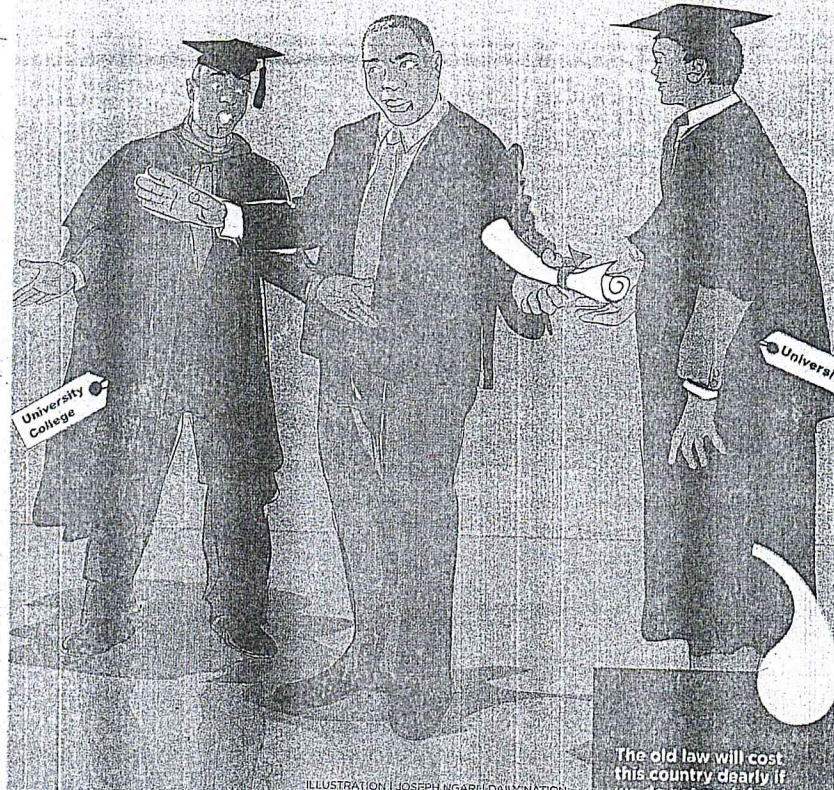


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University College, Chuka University College, Kimathi University College, Kenya Polytechnic University College, and Mombasa Polytechnic University College.

The others are Pwani University College, South Eastern University College, Meru University College of Science and Technology, Narok University College, Kabianga University College, Bondo University College, and

Chepkoiel University College. These university colleges, picked from a list of 25 that the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) had approved for upgrading, had met the quality assurance, accreditation and re-affirmation status, and were accordingly eligible to operate as universities in Kenya.

The old law will cost this country dearly if we do not push for the proposed one."

Prof Noah Midamba, Vice Chancellor of KCA University

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CAMPUS NEWS

SCHOLARS LINE UP SERIES OF RESEARCH SEMINARS

Graduate schools of several universities, the National Council of Science and Technology (NCST), and the Kenya DAAD Scholars Association (KDSA) have organised training workshops for research proposal writing to be held from July 25 to 27 at seven centres country-wide. The venues are yet to be announced.

Various experts will offer the training at no fee, but applicants will be required to meet their accommodation and transport to their venue of choice. Hosting institutions and the organisers will provide facilitation at the venues, including lunch.

The workshops target holders of Master and Doctorate degrees, who are working in institutions of higher learning and research organisations.

More details about the workshops can be obtained by sending an e-mail to kdsa_conference@yahoo.com

UoN PHARMACY SCHOOL TO GET NEW BUILDING

Plans are on by the University of Nairobi (UoN) to build a school of pharmacy next to Kenyatta National Hospital's casualty unit, bordering the Nairobi Hospice.

The Vice Chancellor of the university, Prof George Magoha, led the laying of the foundation stone of the building on June 27. The new structure is expected to improve the school's learning environment.

UoN's School of Pharmacy was established in 1974. It is the only facility in Kenya that offers degree courses in pharmacy at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Through the years, it has been involved in the training of pharmacy professionals, research and provision of pharmaceutical services.

WEEKEND OF MANY GRADUATION FETES

More than 2,000 graduands received degrees, including postgraduate, at the 32nd Kenyatta University graduation ceremony held on Friday, June 29.

Awarded were 26 PhD degrees, 391 Masters, 16 post-graduate diplomas, 1,541 Bachelor's, 113 diplomas and 17 certificates.

Expectedly, the university's School of Education had the highest number of Bachelor's degree graduates (119), being its flagship programme, followed by Business (143) and Applied Human Sciences (68). The School of Visual and Performing Arts had only one graduate.

And at Strathmore University, the eighth graduation ceremony was highlighted by the completion of the first class of the Bachelor's degree in hospitality and tourism. The event was also on June 29. Thirteen students graduated. The ceremony further included the graduation of the university's second PhD class.

A day after on June 30, Daystar University conferred more than 1000 diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate certificates during its 34th graduation ceremony at the University's Athi River Campus.

This year's graduation theme was "Harmonious Living: United People, United Africa, United Nations". It aimed at inspiring communities to be at peace with each other as the country prepared for general elections.

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Mounting anxiety over Universities Bill

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Now that ministry has harmonised the Bill with the observations and recommendations contained in a report of the task force set up to align higher education with the constitution, the minister is convinced that it is good to go.

The Bill proposes that the letters of interim authority that CHE gives private colleges that have applied for university charter be anchored in the main law, and not as subsidiary legislation as is presently the case.

In the current law, letters of interim authority awarded to private university colleges and presidential decrees to public

university constituent colleges place them in some withholding space between a college and a university. This leaves them with very little authority.

They can offer degree programmes, but the awarding of those degrees is done by the parent university.

According to the Vice Chancellor of KCA University, Prof Noah Midamba, who was in the team that drafted the final bill and whose institution operates under a letter of interim authority, it would be unfortunate if the proposed law was not enacted soon.

"The proposed law will benefit the higher education sector in Kenya. It will bring



about competition and it will also enable further growth of the crucial sector," he says.

"The old law will cost this country dearly if we do not push for the proposed one..."

The argument is that the Bill

will enable the creation of more universities, which, apart from enhancing competition, will promote accelerated intake especially when the first cohort of the free primary education beneficiaries joins university later this year.

Accordingly, Prof Kamar is calling upon the private sector to consider investing in higher education.

When contacted, the Chairman of the National Association of Private Universities in Kenya Mr Simon Gicharu, said:

"We need a current law that will address the current issues and also develop the sector hence the need to support the new Bill.