

**University of Ghana Graduation Ceremony School of Graduate Studies  
(18 November, 2018)**

**Remarks by Prof. Kwesi Yankah, Minister of State, Tertiary**

**Graduate Students**

Madam Chancellor, Members of University Council, Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Provosts, Deans, Heads of Departments, Convocation, Graduates and Parents.

I have been asked to say a few words on this occasion and I have obliged to make a few remarks. This cohort of students splendidly dressed before us, are graduating from the graduate school, and I have to directly address you as you exit the Legon portals colourfully decorated by the University with various postgraduate degrees. Many advanced countries distinguish colleges from universities, even though both of these institutions grant degrees; the difference being that Universities are distinguished by having gone beyond undergraduate degrees and also offering post graduate degrees.

Most African universities are predominantly undergraduate teaching institutions. Very few can truly be said to be research universities; these include University of Ibadan, which even though established in the same year as University of Ghana in 1948, now has a graduate population of over 40%-45% of the total student body. The University of Ghana's graduate population is still about 11 % eleven percent of the total student body having tremendously scaled up efforts from the 6% enrolment some 9 years ago.

**Independent Thinking**

But graduate training has been a distinguishing mark for universities the world over, since the construction of knowledge and the quality of research move several notches up. Similarly, the student is not simply a student anymore; he\she is expected to be good enough to create knowledge and impart this knowledge created to the young ones.

Graduate work indeed takes you to the threshold of being your own man or woman. And when you accomplish graduate work, depending on your level of attainment, the period of apprenticeship may be over, and you are preparing to take off as a master craftsman, seeking to impart knowledge you have independently constructed through research, thesis writing, project work, etc. That level of

education naturally adds value to your analytical perspectives, your sense of inquiry, and the quality of your analysis in every department of life.

Indeed the world over, post graduate education has been considered as one of the key performance indicators in economic development. The total list of indicators includes post graduate enrolment, proportion of academic staff with doctoral degrees, research funding per academic.

Orientation to research is key in the graduate school, for doing research is supreme. But why research?

### **Data Shortage**

Research is key in renewing the content of curriculum across all levels of education. New knowledge and innovation help to inject new life into teaching and learning. At the level of tertiary education, the more new knowledge we introduce to students, the more we get students to be more and more inclined towards research, independent thinking, and the urge to cultivate originality, and intellectual creativity. As a country, as a continent, we are simply fed up being stereotyped as perpetually hooked to quaint and outworn knowledge, indeed as institutionalizing the recycling of obsolete, imported ideas, even if these are of no relevance to our local circumstances.

The passion for research and critical analysis, naturally has a significant impact on the quality of a nation's development. The passion for evidence-based analysis deepens, so is the appetite for data, data, data, as the basis for planning planning, planning. I say this to lament the relative paucity of reliable data in almost every department of life in African countries, giving one the sense that we do our planning for development virtually on the basis of conjecture. We sometimes decide people's health status on the basis of guess work; we sometimes plan future of education, on the basis of inaccurate and statistics. We indeed run our nations suddenly into a ditch, simply because there was no data or dashboard, antenna or compass to tell us we are moving towards a deep trench.

Happily, here comes our cohort of graduate students graduating today, to change the game. Here you come to tell the world: we can add value to the nation's sense of planning, our nation's agenda for development. Where planning in 20th century Africa was fed on empty data, here we come with tools that can change the destiny of this country, the destiny of Africa.

## **Capacity Building**

But graduate work is also the cornerstone by which an academic institution renews itself, and builds its own capacity to replace ageing faculty and staff. I refer to the distinctive significance of the doctorate degree, as a major tool by which ageing faculty may be replaced in universities.

The ongoing debate about ageing and retiring faculty in universities is also a statement on the capacity of graduate schools to expedite the production of doctoral degree holders to replace retiring faculty. Indeed, not only should universities step up the production of doctoral degree holders. We should make a conscious effort to produce terminal degree holders who are below the age of 30. That way they have the opportunity to themselves disseminate, or even further interrogate the knowledge they have produced long before they retire.

## **Graduate Reforms**

The current trend of targeting a PhD at a very advanced age, should give way to doctoral degree attainment in a modern society at a primeage. This has been considerably facilitated by educational reforms which have drastically reduced the average age of entering a university, from 21 in yesteryear to 17. This should be - followed by structural reforms in all graduate schools, including accelerated doctoral programs where smart final year undergraduate students are earmarked and soon put on accelerated doctoral programs, as is done in several countries. The University of Ghana itself has experienced such reforms in the recent past and should maintain the momentum and speed up doctoral training.

The Ministry of Education has finally received a monumental document put together by the Cliff Tagoe Committee on Ghana's Tertiary Education Policy, the first ever in Ghana's tertiary education. This report presented to us last week after 5 months of deliberations by a nine-member committee, chaired by a formidable past Vice Chancellor of Legon, includes emerging state policies on tertiary education, that are critical in achieving national objectives. A stakeholder workshop planned for mid-December, will subject the document to further discussion.

## **Concluding**

Fellow Graduands, today is your day. Make the best of it as you breathe in the fresh air of self-elevation. But always remember that the weapon you now wield

is powerful enough to pave the way for a new future, but also potent enough to transform the quality of life in your environment and beyond.

Let me first congratulate you all for your outstanding performances as well as your scale of endurance in surviving the challenges of working and coming out in flying colours. You are graduate at a time all eyes are on your University, Legon, as it basks in the glory of a 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This naturally compels an introspective look at what value you have added to the Legon graduate legacy, and the responsibility you have to keep the torch burning.

But let me also congratulate your supervisors, and mentors – those quiet and unseen faces behind your success, who are sometimes forgotten in acknowledgements, but who have been your be-all and end-all, and have stuck with you throughout this academic pilgrimage.

Finally, your parents and relatives here. Thanks for sticking with your wards, and bearing with them in an almost unending sojourn, which ends today in smiles.

Thank you very much, and congratulations, Ghana's premier University.