Mount Kenya University 18th Graduation Ceremony

Mount Kenya University holds its first virtual graduation today

ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs Cabinet Secretary Joe Mucheru to preside as chief guest

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Mount Kenya University (MKU) is set to graduate its students virtually for the first time today.

ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs Cabinet Secretary Joe Mucheru, the chief guest at the ceremony, says this demonstrates the power of the internet, and urges all Kenyans to tap this technology to further develop the country.

Mr Mucheru says at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic when the country endured lockdown, technology enabled institutions to continue operations. ICT, he notes, helped people to "productively work from the safety of their homes".

The ICT cabinet secretary says that the government continues to invest in expanding internet connectivity, and is especially focusing in areas that are underserved. This explains President Uhuru Kenyatta's launch of the Loon Internet Balloons mid this year, he says.

Noting that internet use in the country has been growing, Mr Mucheru says Kenyans have yet to fully exploit the technology for their benefit.

By January this year, Kenya had 22.86 million internet users. The country witnessed an increase of 3.2 million new users from the preceding year.

The CS observes that the pandemic had forced institutions of higher learning to innovate on how to teach students during lockdown.

These institutions, he says, have "adopted new ways of teaching, delivering content and administering examinations by leveraging on use of diverse technologies."

Mr Mucheru notes that MKU is graduating students virtually today as a result of having in ICT system that enabled it to shift its students online and to other platforms. Therefore, they completed their studies.

He says MKU's 18th Graduation Ceremony theme, "Embracing Innovative Digital Technologies in Higher Education: Excelling Amidst Emerging Challenges", captures the realities of the 'new normal'.

eongwae@ke.nationmedia.com

Joe Mucheru, Cabinet Secretary for ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs

22.86 million

The number of internet users in Kenya by January this year, an increase of 3.2 million new users from the preceding year, according to ICT cabinet secretary Joe Mucheru.

Why MKU was able to instantly transfer all lessons online

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Sustained investments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enabled Mount Kenya University (MKU) to defy the Covid-19 pandemic and successfully teach and graduate students.

MKU Board Chairman and founder, Prof Simon Gicharu, says he is grateful that these investments, made over time, have paid off at a critical moment.

He says the university's elaborate ICT infrastructure enabled it to transfer all its students to the online platform and to support them remotely. Therefore, they continued learning soon after the government suspended face-to-face teaching.

MKU is conducting its virtual graduation ceremony today, with the Chancellor, Prof John Struthers, presiding over the event from Scotland, his home country. A guest speaker, Prof Phillip Machanick, of the University of Rhodes, will address the audience from South Africa.

Prof Gicharu promises that the university's Board of Directors has vowed to continue investing in ICT in support of students and staff.

Prof Simon Gicharu

These investments will sustain learning amid the pandemic and going forward.

He reveals that MKU also invested resources in meeting the protocols prescribed by the Ministry of Health and the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the midst of the crisis, MKU won two awards from the United States-based Talloires Network of Engaged Universities.

This year, jointly with international non-governmental organisation Partners for Care, MKU won a Sh2 million University Innovative Civic Engagement Award, from the Talloires Network. Through their water backpack project, the two partners aim to reduce water-borne illnesses and preventable diseases in communities.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, these partners have been setting up hand washing stations with a view to breaking the chain of infection through hygiene.

Prof Gicharu has praised an MKU ICT expert, Geoffrey Omangi, who won a Talloires Network of Engaged Universities logo competition that attracted thousands of contestants from all over the world.

eongwae@ke.nationmedia.com

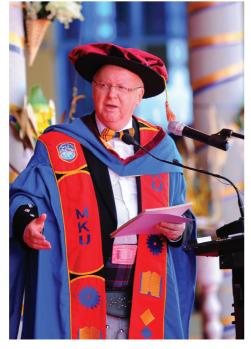# Graduation credentials to be conferred from Scotland

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Today, Mount Kenya University's (MKU's) Chancellor, Prof John Struthers, will preside over an unusual graduation ceremony. It will be the first time in the history of the university that students will graduate virtually and audiences will participate remotely with the aid of various technologies.

Prof Struthers did not travel to Kenya as he normally would during graduations. He will instead confer certificates, diplomas and degrees from his country, Scotland.

The chancellor credits the university's success in preparing students for their final studies, and ultimately graduation during the Covid-19 period, to the cultivation of powerful partnerships. He cites partnerships with Safaricom, TV47 and Microsoft as having especially contributed to this success. The collaborations helped MKU to sustain digital connectivity and capacity building.

Prof Struthers lauds Safaricom for providing online connectivity to students and staff at a reduced cost.

He praises TV47 for partnering with MKU to deliver teaching to students through a joint service.

Prof John Struthers, Chancellor MKU.

MKU, he says, deployed Microsoft Teams to carry out various operations during the lockdown by the government to control the spread of the coronavirus. It conducted online meetings, teaching and examinations using various Microsoft Teams applications.

Prof Struthers says MKU also secured various grants during the Covid-19 period. One of these was a DAAD grant from Germany, for a five-year, fully sponsored partnership project called African Centre for Career Enhancement and Skills Support (ACCESS).

Since March this year, MKU partnered with Lapid Leaders Africa (LLA), a non-profit organisation, to train 15 students and alumni on soft skills. The objective is to prepare them to become the next generation of African leaders, capable of successfully transiting from the academic world to the job market. The training is ongoing.

A training academy set up at MKU through the support of global digitals services provider VMware, has coached 15 members of staff to be VMware trainers. The staff have in turn trained 20 students.

eongwae@ke.nationmedia.com

Mount Kenya University 18th Graduation Ceremony

Varsity avoids laying off staff during Covid-19

MKU Council Chairman says the university has streamlined work policies in support of employees and students

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Mount Kenya University (MKU) continues to find ways of motivating its employees, whom it retained in spite of the challenges brought by Covid-19. It also introduced guidelines on how to teach, examine and graduate students using online platforms.

The MKU University Council Chairman, Prof David Serem,

MKU Convention Centre.

says the university has made efforts to streamline work policies in support of employees and students.

Prof Serem says one of the key policies the council tweaked

was the one on teaching staff appointment and promotion. It amended these guidelines in view of the challenges posed by Covid-19.

In the context of the pandemic, the university council reviewed its human resource to ensure every job was aligned to MKU's mission and institutional functions.

Several recommendations emerged from the review, highlighting what needed to be done to re-align jobs to the institution's requirements. The proposals also captured how jobs should be graded, and specified the terms of service to accompany each job.

Because the Covid-19 pandemic discontinued physical presentation of students' postgraduate work, the MKU Council approved several guidelines on how this can be done using web technologies.

Joint inspection ranks MKU Medical School top in Kenya

BY EVANS ONGWAE

Final year medical students at Mount Kenya University (MKU), comprising the inaugural class, have been recalled to complete their studies after the Covid-19 disruption. They are set to graduate next year.

This comes as the MKU Medical School emerged the best in Kenya this year following a joint inspection by the East African Community Partner States National Medical and Dental Practitioners Regulatory Councils.

The council checks universities' compliance with the provisions of the Regional Guidelines for Inspection and Recognition of Medical Schools in East African Community (EAC) Partner States. MKU scored 82 percent to emerge the best

of all medical schools in Kenya.

MKU medical students who graduate from the school will receive reciprocal recognition in all the East African partner states. They can also practise globally upon meeting requirements or passing additional examinations as may be

necessary in various countries.

Some of the students nearing graduation speak of eye-opening experiences in their six-year training. Lynn Kioko, Mitchelle Kagotho, Salim Getogoro and Yunis Abdi separately say they have gone through unforgettable training experiences that have prepared them to provide quality health services.

eongwae@ke.nationmedia.com

82%
The score that made MKU emerge the best of all medical schools in Kenya

MKU and Osaka City University win malaria research grant

BY EVANS ONGWAE

A Ksh450 million research project to help the country deal with the malaria burden is getting underway in Homa Bay County. It is being implemented by Mount Kenya University (MKU) and Osaka City University, which jointly won a research grant from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). They have partnered with the Homa Bay county government.

Researcher Jesse Gitaka, who works at MKU, is the project manager.

Dr Gitaka reveals that preparations have been made to begin the research in January 2021, owing to Covid-19 having stalled some activities. The project is now back on track and also involves the

Ministry of Health and the Kenya Medical Research Institute (Kemri).

Among other activities, the project will involve the establishment of a cutting-edge molecular and immunology laboratory at MKU's Thika campus. The laboratory will be capable of testing for Covid-19 infection.

It will also involve the exchange training of researchers and students with Osaka

January 2021

The start-date of the JICA funded malaria research in Homa Bay

City University and other collaborating Japanese universities.

Dr Gitaka says the initiative complements the government's effort to eliminate malaria, a leading cause of death in Kenya.

He adds that the project seeks to evaluate the integrated community-directed strategy for malaria elimination in western Kenya. It also seeks to strengthen malaria vector control through establishment of entomological monitoring system at Kemri Kisumu. It is further expected to prevent and offer early diagnosis and treatment against malaria at community level.

eongwae@ke.nationmedia.com

How preparedness enabled MKU to continue operations

BY EVANS ONGWAE

The recalling of both medical and community oral health final year students demonstrates Mount Kenya University's (MKU's) preparedness in the wake of Covid-19. The quickness with which the university transitioned all students to online learning after the government suspended face-to-face learning underlines the university's resilience.

MKU Vice-Chancellor, Prof Stanley Waudo, says the smooth transition allowed students to continue learning uninterrupted even during the Covid-19 lockdown.

MKU Vice Chancelor Prof Stanley Waudo (Right) with Dr Peter Kirira, Ag Principal, College of Postgraduate and Research Studies.

He says the medical students and their community oral health counterparts are undertaking their clinical rotations, after which they will sit their final examinations.

Prof Waudo appreciates the support of TV47. The TV station aired televised lectures, which the students found useful during the transition from physical to online learning.

He says MKU is also effectively implementing its other two mandates, research and community-engagement, amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prof Waudo says MKU researchers have been writing project proposals and implementing existing projects.

Some of the new projects have been funded by the Scottish Funding Council-Global Challenges Research Fund (SFC-GCRF) through the University of Edinburgh internal grants.

Other projects are funded by the Grand Challenges Research Fund (GCRF of UK); Erasmus+; Osaka University of Japan through the Science and Technology Research Partnership for Sustainable Development (SATREPS); Future Leaders African Independent Research (FLAIR); National Research Fund; and DAAD, among others.

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MKU graduates most employable – Study

BY EVANS ONGWAE

An independent industry survey has shown that graduates from Mount Kenya University (MKU) are the most employable. The study CPS Research International, released in May, ranked MKU fourth nationally on the employability index, making its graduates the most popular with employers among all private universities. MKU registered an index of 17 percent based on the number of its continuing students who were working at the same time, as compared to the other universities. It also scored highly on the number of students it graduates every year, again emerging fourth overall with a six per cent index score.

The study was conducted in both public and private universities between the months of November last year and January this year. Today, 4200 graduands from MKU will join the job market and national wealth creation effort.

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