

VICE-CHANCELLOR'S GRADUATION CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS - 01 JUNE 2026

Protocol:-

Chairperson and Members of Council;
Members of the Executive and Senior Management;
Executive Deans and Deputy Deans;
Registrar and Deputy Registrar;
Academics and Professional Support Staff;
Distinguished Guests;
Parents, Guardians, Families and Friends;
And most importantly, our Graduates.

Good afternoon.

Alvin Toffler, the renowned futurist, once observed:

"The illiterate of the twenty-first century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

Few observations capture the demands of the modern age more accurately.

The twenty-first century is characterised by extraordinary advances in science, technology, medicine and human knowledge. Artificial intelligence is reshaping industries, new discoveries continue to expand the boundaries of what is possible, and entire sectors of the global economy are evolving at an unprecedented pace. Yet periods of significant change have always created opportunities for progress.

The future will increasingly favour societies capable of generating knowledge, developing talent, advancing innovation and adapting to changing realities. Universities occupy a central place in that endeavour. Their purpose extends beyond academics. They develop human capability, advance scholarship, cultivate leadership and contribute to economic growth, social progress and societal advancement.

Today's graduation ceremony reflects that enduring purpose.

The qualifications conferred this afternoon represent years of intellectual discipline, academic endeavour and personal sacrifice. They are the product of sustained commitment and a determination to pursue excellence despite competing demands and responsibilities.

For our Master's, MBA and Doctoral graduates, this occasion carries particular significance.

During the graduation period from 1 to 5 June 2026, the Potchefstroom Campus will confer 583 postgraduate qualifications, comprising 482 Master's degrees and 101 Doctoral degrees. These numbers represent more than academic attainment. They reflect advanced scholarship, research capability, professional expertise and leadership capacity entering society.

This afternoon, we celebrate 244 Master's graduates from the Faculties of Economic and Management Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences. Throughout the week, we will also recognise graduates from Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology, together with 101 doctoral candidates whose research contributes to the advancement of knowledge within their respective fields. Collectively, these graduates reflect the breadth of scholarship that characterises the North-West University and the diversity of expertise required to address the opportunities and challenges of our time.

This occasion is also personally meaningful. Amongst those graduating today are two members of my own office who are receiving their MBA qualifications. Their achievement serves as a reminder that learning does not end when one enters the world of work. Professional responsibility and lifelong learning remain inseparable. I therefore extend my sincere congratulations to them and to every graduate who has balanced the demands of work, family and study in pursuit of this important achievement.

Graduates, the attainment of advanced knowledge creates opportunity. It also creates responsibility. Society increasingly looks to those entrusted with advanced knowledge to provide leadership, strengthen institutions, advance innovation and contribute towards solutions that improve lives.

Last week, I attended the Future of Jobs Summit in Johannesburg. Discussions at the Summit reinforced an important reality. Whilst technology continues to reshape economies, industries and labour markets, the qualities most likely to remain in demand are intellectual agility, adaptability, critical thinking, ethical judgement and leadership. These qualities cannot be automated. They remain distinctly human and continue to underpin the value of advanced education and scholarship.

The future economy will undoubtedly be shaped by technological advancement. It will, however, continue to depend upon people capable of exercising sound judgement, leading responsibly and applying knowledge in ways that create value for society.

In many respects, this brings us back to Toffler's observation. The capacity to learn, unlearn and relearn is no longer advantageous; it has become essential. It is a capability that will distinguish successful institutions from unsuccessful ones, and effective leaders from ineffective ones.

At the North-West University, we have embraced this responsibility with deliberate intent. Through our strategy, *Taking NWU Forward: 2024 and Beyond*, we continue to advance impact, innovation, partnerships, internationalisation, diversity, growth and operational excellence. These priorities reflect our conviction that universities must remain relevant to the societies they serve and that knowledge must be translated into impact.

Graduates, you now become ambassadors of these principles.

Whether your future lies in academia, business, government, healthcare, entrepreneurship or industry, leadership will be expected of you. Not because of the qualification you receive today, but because of the knowledge, capability and judgement that accompany it. Leadership is stewardship. It is the responsible exercise of influence. It is the ability to remain guided by principle and to act with integrity, particularly when circumstances are difficult.

For many amongst you, this achievement extends beyond personal accomplishment. For some seated before us today, you are the first in your family to obtain a postgraduate qualification. For others, you are the first to attain a Master's degree, an MBA or a Doctorate. Such achievements alter the trajectory of families, expand possibilities for future generations and demonstrate what becomes possible when talent is matched with opportunity and determination.

Your parents, guardians, families and loved ones have every reason to stand proud today. Many have contributed to this achievement through sacrifice, encouragement and unwavering belief in your potential. We equally acknowledge those who are no longer with us, but whose values, guidance and sacrifices remain part of your journey and whose contribution is reflected in your success today.

There remains wisdom in the African proverb which reminds us that it takes a village to raise a child. Behind every qualification conferred today stands a collective investment of family members, mentors, supervisors, academics, professional support staff, sponsors and communities. Today's achievement therefore belongs not only to the graduates, but also to those who have accompanied them on this journey.

The future remains rich with possibility. You now possess the knowledge, capability and opportunity to help shape it.

Carry the name of this University with dignity. Apply your knowledge with wisdom. Exercise leadership with integrity. Continue advancing scholarship. Continue strengthening institutions. Continue creating opportunities for others.

May your contribution be significant and your leadership be principled. And may your success contribute to the advancement of society and the betterment of humanity.

A pula ele nele!

Makuqhame kwande!

Ri a di hudza nga inwi!

I thank you.