

Text of address given at the ANC (Colombo) Awards Night 2011 on behalf of NCUK

Honoured Guests, Members of ANC, parents, friends

With your indulgence I plan to address our young people, the people for whom this Awards Night is primarily intended.

The definition of a good lecture is where the lecturer

- tells students what he/she is going to talk about
- talks about it
- tells them what he/she has talked about.

So, I am going to start with an aspect of the College before I address the question of social pressures and will conclude with some aspects about cultural differences so that when you transfer to wherever you go you will not suffer too much culture shock,

You have been in the College for some time, some longer than others. I wonder whether you have ever stopped to look at the ANC crest, something that is hard to miss in the College? No I don't mean the lion rampant regardant (to use a heraldic term). How many of you have looked at the motto *Disce ut Ducas*. *Ut* is a wonderful word in Latin which means 'so that you may'. Together the three words are an instruction: (you) learn so that (you) may lead. What a wonderful motto for this country!

My own motto is somewhat different: *Doceo ut se Discerunt*: I teach so that they may learn themselves.

However, at a personal level I am driven by *Docere est Discere*: To teach is to learn.

Many of you will know that I was born and educated in Ireland where our national poet is William Butler Yeats. What fewer people know is that his brother, Jack B. Yeats was a very famous painter and if you buy one of his works then you have made a sound investment.

In about 1938 a group of students from the Art College in Dublin called upon Jack B. - one of them was my Dad, who told me the story. At some point Yeats asked them a technical question and they protested that they were only students "Ah yes" he responded "sure aren't we all students". And that is the way it is. You and I, we are all students and I will ask "what have you learnt today?"

I am very proud of my NCUK students. Year on year NCUK Engineering at ANC attracts outstanding students. Whether it is electrical, mechanical, civil or aeronautical our faculty bring out the best in everyone. This year we have a class of 26 engineers and of those who have completed the full course we have three who have scored A*, three who have scored A and fifteen who have scored B. Now by any standards that is quite remarkable and is a credit to you all and to your teachers.

But now that you have achieved this what are you going to do? Indeed, what are you going to do when you have obtained your degree? There are many people here who proudly tell me that they have a degree from a top university. "I have a first class honours from Imperial in London" or "I have a degree from Peradenya". Sorry, but that simply does not wash with me. When I started working for Philips many years ago I was told "Okay, so your PhD got you the job and a higher starting salary, but how you progress in this Company will depend on what you do from this moment onwards." Same here. For me, it will not be the degree you get from wherever. It will be what you do with it that will gain my admiration.

Now let me talk about cultural differences.

I will start with a story about one of your number. Whenever we would meet over the past few weeks he would say "you need a haircut". It was true. I did, but there were two things that he did not know. The first is that the Irish are a cursed people, who will do the exact opposite of what they are told. Shortly after independence the Government decreed that everyone should speak Irish and that almost killed off our national language. The second thing that he did not realise was that his actions are typical of members of a pull-down society, but before I elaborate on that I will admit that I did get my hair cut. That was because my wife was arriving from UK and in the UK culture there is the concept of 'she who must be obeyed'

When I worked at the NCUK College in Shanghai one of the other teachers commented on the fact that China was one of the strongest pull-down societies in the world but I suppose that in a country of 1.3 billion people we can't have lots of individuals each trying to stand out. What would it be like if we had 1.3 billion people each wanting to be a dictator? So, if individuals try to stand out above the rest then society pulls them down. But this desire to have the other person conform is very strong everywhere. In the last week at ANC I have counted "why do you walk round with that back-pack on your back?" Now, where else would I put it? "Your tea-cup needs cleaning" Yes, but I am trying to season it like a whiskey barrel. "You make your letter '9' in a funny way" They haven't seen how I form the letter '8' and anyway I like the symmetry of an upside-down six. All good fun, but there is a serious aspect to this. If you want to make an impact in the world, if you want to be remembered, then you often have to go against convention and that can be a lonely thing to do. As someone who has done it all their life I ask "do you want to do it?"

Sometimes cultural differences have their roots in family influences, or indeed, the lack of family influences. You may be surprised by the attitudes of the Chinese students who you encounter at your chosen university. In this context you should be aware that with the Chinese single child policy most fellow students from the Peoples' Republic will have no brothers and no sisters. In fact, they have no uncles or aunts. When their parents/grand-parents pass on they will be alone in the world. Now, is that or is that not scary? So, if they seem to behave differently to you, then it may be because of the lack of family influences, of which you have had such benefits.

There are other parts of the world where the cultural attitude is "If at first you don't succeed then give up". However, there are other cultures which have a 'can-do-will-do' approach and that in large part accounts for the American success. You and I have a lot to learn from this. On the world stage your country and mine are small. If you are ambitious, and I hope that you are then you, your family and your country will want you to make an impact on the world. You need a 'can-do-will-do' mind set. During my time here at ANC I have seen plenty of 'Can-Do'. Now it is up to you to go out and make your family, your schools, this College and this country feel proud of you and your achievements as we all feel proud of you this evening.

Many of you who are going to UK have already been told by me that you may find yourselves daunted by some of your fellow students who will appear to be supremely confident. Many of those who have gone through the private education system in UK are trained to have an accurate measure of their ability and how work/study can be translated into attainment. There are many who will know exactly how much effort is required to get the degree that they want and remember that not everybody is aiming for a first. For many, a lower second might be quite sufficient to allow them to reduce the amount of study that they do so that they can have a whopping good time at university. I was not educated in this way and most of you have not been trained to have this level of self-knowledge, but you can learn. Look at the effort that you put in. Look at the result that you get and use these as metrics to inform your next challenge.

So, coming to my final thought, I would like to look to the past and to the future.

Twenty three years before the Christian era the Roman poet Horace wrote

Nil mortalibus ardua est
caelum ipsum petimus stultitia

Nothing is difficult for mankind
We seek heaven itself in our folly

I effectively started my journey at the age of fifteen, the time when I first knew where I was going and I often reflect upon what has been achieved since then: In fifty years we have developed silicon transistors, integrated circuits, electronic calculators, portable computers, long-distance analogue telephony, digital telephone exchanges, optical fibre cables, mobile phones, the compact cassette,

walkmans, iPods, iPads, GPS, the World Wide Web. Computers, telecommunications, the Internet have completely changed business and the way we interact. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that the Internet is as important in its way as the introduction of printing was in medieval Western Europe. Sorry Horace I don't accept that any of this has been folly. It is the product of worthy human endeavour.

Your future should be a journey of learning, discovery and contributing to this endeavour.

Enjoy it and good luck.