**Speech by HE Geoff Tooth,**

**Australian High Commissioner to Kenya**

**at the Edith Cowan University Alumni function**

**Southern Sun Mayfair Hotel, Nairobi, 15 May 2013**

Thank you, Can I start by warmly welcoming back to Kenya Athol Smith and Kevin Vanderplank of Edith Cowan University. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Brenda Wabule, Business Development Manager, Austrade and Filippo Raggi, WA Trade Office’s Commercial Manager for Africa and encourage all Edith Cowan University alumni with an interest in business and trade to talk to them tonight. And of course the High Commission’s good friends at Aussie, Dipti Fernandes, and AEC, Mahul Shah and Geet Shana.

All Edith Cowan alumni present here today deserve to be congratulated for recognising the importance of remaining part of the ECU community. But let me particularly single out some future alumni, the 8 students in this room who will be joining ECU in 2013. I would like to reassure you, and your parents and guardians, that you have made a very wise choice; I am sure you will hear this echoed by those that you talk to tonight who studied in Perth. Edith Cowan is an elite educational institution with a strong international reputation. It has produced outstanding graduates in business, law, medicine, the arts and sciences, and has some of Australia’s leading academics. I have little doubt that you will find that your years at Edith Cowan will be amongst the best and most rewarding of your life. You may even get to meet the famous actor Hugh Jackman, one of your fellow alumni. Hugh nearly made it to Kenya last year as an Ambassador for World Vision but, much to the disappointment of my wife in particular, had to cancel at the last minute.

Ladies and gentlemen, alumni and future alumni,

As past and future international students in Australia you are part of a major economic and social success story. Australia is recognized as a world leader in international education and training, providing opportunities for students from more than 190 countries. We have one of the highest proportions of international students in our higher education system of any country in the world, with very significant numbers from Kenya and Africa as a whole. Over the last five years we have significantly increased our scholarships to Africa – over a thousand are now awarded each year with Kenya getting a sizeable share. Recent surveys of international students have found that satisfaction rates of international students remain extremely high – with the vast majority being very positive about the learning experience and some 85 percent with living in Australia. About 80 percent said Australia was their first country of choice primarily because of the quality of our teaching and the lifestyle they would experience, including their personal safety.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe Alumnis are an essential part of the education story. Kenyans who have studied in Australia or in Kenya with Australian institutions, are a vital bridge in developing the relationship between our two countries, and maximising the benefits of an Australian education. Alumnis like this one should give you a forum to network, to do business, to discuss community projects and to maintain your links with Australia.

The Australian government for its part intends to remain supportive of existing alumni associations, help establish new ones and provide professional development opportunities, such as thematic workshops and conferences. I was delighted a couple of weeks ago to launch the Kenyan Australia Alumni Association, an association that already has around 140 members or prospective members, and will be holding its first annual general meeting on 22 June. I would encourage all of you to join the KAAA and I’m sure Mahul and Geet would be delighted to discuss this with you tonight.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Edith Cowan, was a very great Australian indeed. She was the first woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament and a pioneer in many fields. Cowan believed that education was the key to growth, change and improvement. She strove to achieve social justice and campaigned for the rights of women, children and families, for the poor, the poorly educated and the elderly. Australia holds her in such great stead that her image is on Australia’s $50 dollar note, worth about 40,000 Kenyan schillings. Edith Cowan has been an inspiration to many, Australian and international students alike. I hope that her story, and your association with the institution that bears her name, will inspire all here today to great things too.

Thank you for listening and good luck with all your endeavours.