

Professor Ed Byrne AC
Graduation address, May 2017

It is a great feeling to be back at a university where I spent some of the most fulfilling years of my career and a huge privilege to join you today for one of the most significant occasions in the annual life of the University, a graduation ceremony.

I am delighted to join the Monash University community as an honorary alumnus but the accolades today must go to those who have earned them that is you who have completed some years of arduous study and fulfilled the requirements to be awarded a degree by a great university.

Achievements at this level in life are special and it is important that you will take some time to rejoice in what you have achieved in completing your degrees. You, today's graduates, are leaving university at one of the most challenging and tumultuous times in recent history.

When one looks around the world, one sees discord in more regions and for many years. The international economy still has major challenges and the environmental issues to be overcome in providing a reasonable standard of living for almost 10,000,000,000 people still presents massive challenges.

Yet much is positive. You are graduating in one of the most stable countries in the world with a high standard of living and strong civic traditions. Australia is a beacon of light for many other countries around the world.

The yin and the yang of good and bad have always been part of life and it is always a personal decision whether one takes a glass half full or a glass half empty view of things. I encourage you all to take a glass half full view and to do your very best to move the world in that direction both in your personal sphere of influence and in your capacity to act as an engaged and committed citizen.

I would like to briefly address in very general terms what the world holds for today's graduates in the decades ahead. Many of you will enter the workforce directly from university. Others will go on and do further periods of study to strengthen professional qualifications or continue academic training.

For most of you, the next stage of your career will involve developing really strong professional skills and specialised knowledge enabling you to develop a successful career in your chosen discipline.

It will be crucial to maintain your knowledge and skill base in the years ahead. In the past, for example when I graduated in 1974, a professional degree had currency for many years without the need for regular refresher courses as the knowledge base was relatively stable.

Of course that is no longer the case and it is essential in almost every discipline that one constantly refreshes once knowledge and in many disciplines that more formal periods of relearning take place.

A steady increase in lifespan and the tendency for people to work into what was considered old age have resulted in a situation where today's graduates are likely to live into 90s and to pursue more than one career. An inevitable consequence of this is that many of you will return to university in the future and undertake further periods of study at postgraduate level to reposition yourself in the workforce.

As you develop your careers, soft skills will become increasingly important. The ability to analyse, to find justifiable and useful positions in what seems to be a maze of ambiguity, to sort through difficult interpersonal relationships and make teams work, to understand the higher level issues that guide strategy over years and decades as well as the issues of immediate concern and to be able to manage up down and sideways effectively skills that will serve you well if you wish to progress to more senior roles in large organisations. If you are developing your own business, the same skills help and even more the ability to think laterally and to position a new idea or concept in the marketplace.

In work terms, most of you will measure your success by your achievements in a primary career and if you work in large organisations by your promotion to more senior roles. I have no doubt that you will continue to build on the excellent start you've made at Monash University as your careers develop.

Equally important to one's primary career is one's role as a committed citizen. The education you have had at Monash University will have prepared you for that. This has both a local and global aspect.

The local aspect involves engaging in one's local community through community service, charitable activities and supporting community organisations. It involves playing your part in ensuring that the community living is a functional and nurturing one.

The wider aspect involves ensuring that you are across the major issues of the time, sometimes referred to as global grand challenges, and are able to make your contribution as an educated citizen. This is often a passive one involving inability to understand and analyse issues and sometimes a more active one as challenges come up with you wish to make a more personal contribution.

There are diverging views about many of the key issues facing the planet and it behoves all educated citizens to understand these issues and take a position. This often involves an understanding of the scientific perspective but also of socio-political issues that always arise where major actions contemplated or needed.

It is also important to understand that in life not everyone will have the same view of things and to have respect and to be able to debate in a listening way with those who hold alternative views is crucial. The combination of a successful career and successful

citizenship play a large role in a sense of personal fulfilment.

Even more important however once family and friends. Engagement with family, making time for parents even after leaving home, and time for partner and children however demanding ones work, is essential for true happiness and self-worth.

The person who is a workaholic who ends up estranged from his or her loved ones is a stereotype we all know. The person who spends too much time at work and not enough on family or recreational activities and as a result has a less fulfilling life is much commoner and easier mistake to make.

There will be times in all of your lives when getting things right is extremely hard. You just won't have enough time to do everything you need to do. If you have to make compromises make sure they're not for too long and that as soon as you can you get your life back into balance.

Monash University is a relatively young university, founded not long after the Second World War. In that time it has reached stellar heights becoming one of the best universities in the world however measured, a university that not only excels in league tables but makes an immense service contribution in Victoria and around the world.

My current university in London, King's, is a lot older but shares with Monash an absolute commitment to excellence, to making the world a better place. Both institutions do this largely through the contributions of their alumni.

There are countless Monash graduates who have made massive contributions in many fields. I have no doubt that today's graduating classes will add to that further.