

Graduation address 20 March 2013
University of South Australia, Adelaide Convention Centre
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Graduation, teaching and the job market

Thank you Deputy Chancellor. Thank you Vice-Chancellor, for the invitation to address today's graduates. I wish you all the best in your challenging job!

So. Graduation has come at last. The long wait is over. You can relax and celebrate.

Your families will also celebrate. Graduation is a great day for families. It is one of the few important rites of passage. Birth and death. Marriage and childbirth—and graduation! In these milestone moments we are not alone. Your graduation achievement rests on the efforts of many people. All helped to create the conditions that enabled you, the graduate, to bring your life forward as you are doing today. Some are here and some are not. Mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers. Grandparents. Aunts and uncles. Friends of the family. The long line of teachers, from pre-school to university. All of your friends and relatives will be proud. At the same time it is still your own achievement. Totally. It could not have been done without *you*.

What will you take from this degree program at the University into the next phase of your life? At this moment it is impossible to fully understand how the experience has shaped you and will go on shaping you. Our first impulse as graduates – I know I felt this myself at the end of my first degree – is to say that most of what we learned was useless. At this moment, the world outside the university looks smarter than the world within. We are impatient to get on with life. But it is easy to underestimate the powers of higher education. It shapes us at the core of our personality. Many of the effects are hidden and emerge bit by bit over the lifetime. These effects also differ from person to person. What you have gained here will depend partly on the contents of your degree program. It will partly depend on the opportunities you have in future, to use what you learned here. And it will partly depend on your own willingness to keep learning, to build on what you have gained.

For most education graduate the relationship between education and work looks straightforward. In the beginning, at least, you know where you are going. Teaching is demanding. It fully engages you: intellectually, socially and emotionally. It is a craft that takes years to acquire in full. It is also a mission. Teaching is awesome in its importance to society. Perhaps there is no more vital job, except the unpaid job of parent. Teaching is respected in Australia. But not respected enough. Teaching pays well at first, less well in later years. This is something many of us want to change. In standout nations in education and the economy, such as Finland and Korea – nations where children learn at higher standards than Australians, and nearly all children learn at high standards – teaching is like law or medicine here. In those countries teaching is among the most respected professions and paid accordingly. In countries where schools are at the heart of things, there are few limits on what the society can achieve.

At the same time, your training as an education graduate equips you to work broadly. Good teachers have the skills of organization, management, communications and human relations. They are at home with knowledge and information. They are creative. Practical. Good at solving problems. They are leaders. These qualities make them attractive. Employers want people who are bright, capable, flexible and interactive. So professionally-qualified education graduates end up in all kinds of jobs. Many become self-employed. The same kind of mixed outcome is true for doctoral graduates. About half those with PhDs or EdDs enter academic positions. The other half take their advanced intellectual skills, their ability to manage a problem, conduct an original inquiry and see into the heart of things, to many different places.

It is the way labour markets work. Graduates respond to the opportunities before them. All over the world, many graduates move away from their initial training. And so graduates often move away from their initial training. But that initial training remains essential, regardless of where you go. It is the source of the advanced skills that will carry you through working life. What you have acquired is not just particular knowledge about teaching, but the ability to acquire knowledge, to use and apply knowledge, and to keep on learning. And to delight in learning. This makes you a powerful example for those around you. In this way you will continue to inspire curiosity and learning in others. Whatever your job, wherever you work. In a larger sense than just a teaching job alone, you will always be an educator.

In future, if you want, you can return to the University and go on learning in the formal sense by doing a higher degree. And you can contribute to this community, this University, your experience as a graduate. As a citizen. And perhaps as a parent. The University as a social institution is dedicated to your discipline, the discipline of education. You will always be welcome here. Your voice will always matter here.

This degree has finished. But the University goes on. Life goes on. Fortunately, Graduation Addresses do not, and I will finish here! It has been an honour to share your day with you. I congratulate you all, graduates and families, most warmly and wish you all the very best fortune in future.