

Congratulations to you all - and thank you very much for inviting me to be your guest of honour today at this wonderful celebration of your achievements.

It is a huge privilege for me to have been asked to present your awards to you and an immense joy to have had the opportunity to meet you each of you in person - albeit for the very briefest of moments.

I feel sure that now the ceremonial is over most of you can't wait to cast off your academic robes and relax with your family and friends in the warm glow of your success.

Since my speech to you stands in the way of these celebrations, I am sure you will be relieved to know that this will be a short address!

For what more can I offer you other than my heartfelt congratulations on reaching the goals you set yourself and being rewarded with your university degrees and diplomas.

I can't imagine that you want to be reminded of all the hard work, as well as no doubt the hardship, you will have had to make to realise your ambitions today - nor indeed the amount of debt accrued and sacrifice made along the way. But I hope you are sitting there today and thinking 'Yes - it has been worthwhile'.

Some of you may have faced particular disadvantages - ill health, stress or depression, family and child care problems, asylum or immigration issues, accommodation and financial worries - and so we especially recognise your courage and determination in overcoming these difficulties.

I would like to acknowledge this by quoting the words of the American poet Alice Walker. As she says and as our graduates here today will know, 'The World Has Changed'

'So wake up and smell the possibility'

### **Your world has changed**

'It did not change

Without your prayers

Without your faith

Without your determination to believe in liberation and kindness

Without your dancing through the years that had no beat.  
**Your world has changed**

'It did not change

Without your numbers, your fierce love of self and cosmos

It did not change without your strength.

**Your world has changed**

Wake up! Give yourself the gift of a new day.

Let us begin therefore by once again showing our admiration for all the graduates here today by loudly applauding their magnificent achievements.

It is fashionable nowadays to be reminded of the personal, professional and societal advantages derived from a university education as well as the wide opportunities open to graduates.

But knowledge of these benefits are rarely what maintains motivation, sustains our spirits or supports us through the times of difficulty, challenge or uncertainty you may have encountered on the road to your degree.

In order for you, as graduates today, to have attained your goals, you are likely to have been helped by teachers, tutors, friends, family and maybe members of your wider community - some of who may be here to share this occasion with you.

I am sure therefore that you would want to join me in thanking them for the love, belief, and confidence they have placed in you and the support they have given you to obtain your degree.

And so we are all here to affirm your learning and to acknowledge your achievements.

Pause, look around you, take in the atmosphere, reflect, and remember.

This is a life enhancing and as Alice Walker's poem reminds us a life changing moment for you,

for everyone who knows you,  
for ever.....

So let me end with some thoughts on life and learning from another great American writer, Maya Angelou who when asked on her 70 birthday what she had learnt said this

'I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow.'

'I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.'

'I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life.'

'I've learned that making a 'living' is not the same thing as 'making a life.' And 'I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance.'

'I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw some things back.'

'I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision.'

'I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one.'

'I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back.'

'I've learned that I still have a lot to learn.'

And at the end of the day,

'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'

Thank you

Dr. Ann Limb

University of Bedfordshire Degree Ceremony Milton Keynes 25 October  
10.30am and 2.00pm

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