

Acknowledgements

Thank you Chancellor (*The Hon. John Dowd AO QC*) for that kind introduction.

I would also like to acknowledge

- The Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Lee
- The Deputy Chancellor, Mr Trevor Wilson
- The academic staff
- Graduates
- Ladies and gentlemen

Introduction

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure to be a part of this ceremony at Southern Cross University.

I would like to start by offering my congratulations to each of the graduates here today.

Today is a very special occasion.

It signifies the closing of one chapter of your life and the start of another.

Today is a day for you and your families to celebrate this milestone and your success.

Studying for a degree requires both sacrifice and commitment.

It is a large investment of time, money and effort.

There are many things that you would have had to give up in order to earn your degree – and at times you may have had second thoughts.

But a university education is one of the best investments you can make in yourself.

I commend you for your hard work and perseverance during your years of study.

I would also like to acknowledge the families here today who have supported you in that journey - especially the parents and families – who have helped to guide and encourage you over a number of years.

Importance of regional universities

Ladies and gentlemen.

Regional universities such as Southern Cross University play a vital role in Australia's education system and our economy.

Through their research and development they are a source of new knowledge and capabilities not just for regional Australia - but for all Australia.

They help to develop the ideas and the technology that shape our social and economic futures – regionally, nationally and internationally.

They are a key economic driver in the areas which they are located.

Regional universities also serve their communities in ways that some of our larger institutions cannot.

They help to reduce the divide in education and opportunity for people living in the country. They allow regional students to experience the benefits of face to face teaching in their local area – this is especially important for young people who may not be able to afford to travel great distances for study or for those who may not be able to travel due to family commitments.

They also act as a focal point and bring life to regional communities through their activities in the arts, sport and community development.

So I am delighted to see that Southern Cross is now celebrating its 20th year.

That is twenty years of opening minds and empowering students to reach their full potential.

And twenty years of contributing to our region to solve local problems, create economic opportunities and strengthen the fabric of our community.

Throughout all of this - Southern Cross has been helping students to challenge ideas, think critically and find solutions to complex issues.

This is the true value of education.

For it is these skills which will help you to be creative, agile and competitive throughout your career.

Education and Democracy

Ladies and gentlemen, we are a lucky country to live in a country where education is so accessible.

I firmly believe that education and democracy go hand in glove.

In education - it doesn't matter where you have come from - it matters where you are going.

The same is true in a democracy.

In a democracy all of us – men and women – young and old – have the freedom to learn, to examine, to investigate and to challenge ideas.

Education and democracy provide us with opportunity.

It is up to us what we do with that opportunity.

My father came to Australia as a migrant seeking opportunity. Being a child of the chaos of World War 2 Europe he had not enjoyed the benefit of a formal education beyond the most basic.

He quite sensibly steered me towards higher education as an alternative to what he called “doing it the hard way”.

I was the first in my family to go to university.

And it was through my through my studies at Newcastle University – another fantastic regional university - that another world was opened up for me.

It was the world of business and ideas.

It was that opportunity – that stepping stone - that set me on the path to becoming the Member for Cowper and a Federal Minister.

I had no idea when I sat in a similar spot to where you are sitting that these opportunities would come my way.

But it was the freedom of democracy and the power of education that have helped me get there.

I trust that surprising opportunities will also come your way in life as a result of the time and effort you have made in your studies.

The changing nature of work

Ladies and gentlemen, the world of work is constantly changing.

As the Assistant Minister for Employment, it is my job to ensure that more Australians are in work and able to reap the personal and financial benefits of work.

So the links between education – opportunity - and adaptability are very much on my mind.

The headlines of every national newspaper, television and radio bulletin bear witness to the fact that we are an economy in transition.

Thirty years ago - 25 per cent of the workforce was employed in manufacturing and agriculture - now it is only 10 per cent.

Today - 86 per cent of the workforce is employed in the services sector.

In fact we are one of the most service intensive countries in the world and are likely to remain so into the foreseeable future.

In the decade ahead, the growth industries are in health and social services, retail and the construction sectors.

Not only is the world of work changing – the composition of our workforce is changing.

Today we have 5 people in the workforce for every Australian over 65.

By 2050 we will have only 2.7 people in the workforce for each Australian aged over 65.

If we are going to enjoy increasing living standards in the years ahead then we need to make sure that our workforce is as productive as possible.

And - given the bias of our economy towards the services sector, improving the productivity of human capital will be central to lifting national productivity.

This is where your investment in education will deliver rewards for you and our nation.

As I stand before you I can see that our future is in good hands.

I can see the teachers of tomorrow who will help students to learn new ideas in new ways.

I can see those who will help some of the most vulnerable in our society to get back on their feet.

I can see the people who will care for our environment, grow our tourism industry and help us communicate with ever changing technology.

And I also see amongst you the entrepreneurs and business owners of the future who will create jobs and opportunities for others.

As potential leaders of the future, I also encourage all of you to think about how you may be able to help others as you progress in your careers.

As graduates from Southern Cross the qualifications and skills that you have earned will give you that choice.

Whether it be coaching and mentoring a young person starting out - or giving a person a chance to prove themselves with a job – there will be a range of opportunities for you to help others through the world of work.

But above all, I encourage you to think about the importance of continuing to invest in your skills and education to make sure you are well placed to adapt to change and take on new challenges throughout your working lives.

The education you have received provides you with an excellent head-start in your careers.

However, the world of work will continue to change around you and require new skills, new attitudes and new capabilities.

There will be jobs in the future that we cannot even imagine today.

To succeed, you will need a lifelong commitment to learning.

I hope that for many of you – this will be through a continuing involvement with Southern Cross University.

Closing remarks

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your time today.

To those of you graduating today – I congratulate you on your achievements.

I encourage you to take every opportunity in life that comes your way.

I wish you all the very best for the future.