

Charlotte Walsh
Honorary Doctorate in Laws
March 22nd 2014

My Lord Lieutenant, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Honoured Guests, staff, families and graduands

Thank you, Professor Clarke for all your kind words!

It is a huge privilege and honour that the University has bestowed on me today and it gives me enormous pleasure to accept this honorary doctorate. - and it is wonderful to be back in Buckingham to receive it alongside all of you who are about to receive your own degree certificates.

May I start by offering my congratulations to all of you who are graduating today. Enjoy this special moment in your lives to the full. I know that you, like me, are all hugely proud to have been a part of this unique and celebrated University with its great traditions of excellence and diversity.

I shall always be grateful to Buckingham for giving me the chance to seize the opportunities it presented me. But in accepting this degree, I must pay tribute to the supportive and dedicated team that worked with me in the Law School while I was Dean of Law (both the academic and the non-academic staff) and so I accept this degree on behalf of them all. We shared a common passion for being dedicated to our students, for not only promoting the diversity of our student body but of celebrating it, for fostering excellence in teaching and research, for seeking to nurture independent thought and for encouraging all students to exceed their own expectations.

Seeing so many of you here today, confirms that that proud tradition continues.

AND I also want to thank the Vice Chancellor, Dr Kealey, who, although he would often put his head in his hands as I asked for yet more resources to be allocated to the Law School - and I know there were times where I tried his patience greatly - (and occasionally the other way round!), I always knew that I had his friendship and support. I like to think that we worked well together and I would like to take opportunity to thank you for that, Vice Chancellor.

But this is really YOUR day! It is you – the students - who always made my job feel so worthwhile and I am conscious, not only of the hard work you have put in to arrive at this point but also of the sacrifices many of you have made to be here, both financially and in terms of separation from your families.

So I am thrilled to see you all graduate today – it is such an exciting time in all your lives.

But achieving your degree is only the beginning. As you leave the University you have infinite possibilities ahead of you. So my message of today is simple and straightforward – the script of your life is yours to write: nothing is

guaranteed, and everything is possible. Believe in yourself, trust yourself and you will achieve your goals.

And be confident that studying at Buckingham has given you enormous advantages: achieving a degree in two years makes you attractive to employers as proof that you are courageous, you are not afraid of hard work and you can be self motivated. You are also uniquely placed within a ready made global network of friends and alumni – many of them already in key positions - quite literally all over the world. It is heartening that we are sending out more good lawyers to join them!

Most of you have chosen a career in law. I know Shakespeare (and others) have said “Let’s kill all the lawyers” and we often get a bad press! We are a deeply misunderstood profession! But I always think that is borne of envy because lawyers have the skills and opportunities to do a great deal of good in the world in achieving peace and harmony.

You will be relieved to hear that I do not propose to give a lecture on the Rule of Law here but I hope you will remember that it is worth preserving, it is at the heart of our system of justice and it is fragile and it is in danger of being eroded – not least in this country – so it is up to you young people to fight to preserve it, although I don’t pretend that it will be easy

You have already proved that you have the talent and drive within yourselves to succeed, so when you leave here do not be afraid to take risks - sometimes that is the only way to succeed. BUT ALSO do not be afraid to fail occasionally, because life will deal you blows – this is normal! But it doesn’t matter; use them to take the opportunity to learn about yourself. Have the courage to accept when you have made a mistake, analyse what went wrong, learn from it and move on. Everything in life is a learning experience from which you will grow

Lastly, when you are climbing that often greasy pole to success and are probably working very long hours - remember too your families and your friends. However successful you become, however hard you have to work, make time for your families and friends – they are the greatest investment you will ever make.

Oh – and I nearly forgot: Have fun too! Good luck to all of you in your future lives and remember the words of the great Nelson Mandela: “It always seems impossible until it is done”

Thank you Buckingham for the honour you have given me. I accept this Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws with humility, gratitude and pride.