

**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATION CEREMONY
WEDNESDAY 16 APRIL**

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, members of the academic procession, distinguished guests, graduates, family and friends.

I value this award from Macquarie University very greatly indeed. It is a significant honour to have work recognised amongst the highest academic circles in the country. So thank you very much for the honour that you have done me.

I would like to congratulate all those students who are achieving their degrees at this ceremony. Unlike me, I am sure you have worked hard to get to this position and now the world is before you. You have achieved qualifications which are significant and which are important in making your way forward in the years ahead.

I have found in my own time that it was not necessarily what I actually learnt at university that was most useful, although the basic grounding and knowledge and understanding of events or circumstances was, of course, enormously important. Even more important in your own chosen disciplines, is a capacity to make judgements. Nearly every discipline requires the capacity for good judgement, if the best decisions are to be made. It is not something that can be worked out by a formula, it is something that comes from the quality education that you have received.

It was RG Casey, one of Australia's greatest sons, in his day, servant of the empire, as well as of Australia, said *"Judgement is the arbiter of men."*

I was speaking to a trained engineer only a few days ago, and he was putting it to me that Australia spends too much money on education, and that we have too many graduates at a tertiary level. He seemed to think there was some kind of order in society. We need some people to do manual work, another proportion for technical and further education and then a lesser number to win degrees and post-graduate degrees, through our universities. I thought that was a view out of the ark and was surprised to find it in today's world.

If Australia is to have the kind of future that we want, that will enable everyone to find the kind of jobs that will give satisfaction and adequate reward, the best and the most important investment we can make as a nation, is in quality education, certainly through school and certainly to the end of your university career. I also happen to believe that education should be available to people at virtually any age, because learning is a continuous process. It does not stop with the degree itself. Quality education is absolutely critical to Australia, to our future as a vigorous nation, a dynamic place in which to live.

In this globalised world, manufacturers move their place of production from country to country. There is no loyalty to workers, no loyalty to any particular country, as a source of supply. It is a question of who can do it cheapest, at the best price. This is likely to remain a feature of manufacturing for decades to come. If we want Australians to maintain the lifestyle to which many people are accustomed, to be able to enjoy what this country has to offer, it is going to be extraordinarily hard to compete as a manufacturing nation, except in the most specialist of areas.

Our future rests in a different direction, in quality education from day one, to day end, in enabling Australians to unleash their skills, their talents, their imagination, to encourage

them to experiment, to be progressive, to do new things, to have the courage to do it differently and to do it better. This requires, not only very significant investment in education, it also requires dedicated, hard-working students, who will take advantage of the opportunities available to them, as indeed, you who are graduating today, have already done.

So, quite unlike my engineering friend, I believe that the better education Australia has available to its people, the more people whose talents and imaginations can be unleashed, the better will our future be. This is an area where Australians will always be able to compete.

The challenge is to stay ahead because new nations emerging from poverty have many bright people who work extraordinarily hard. They want to get away from where they were and Australians are going to have to do their best to keep up, to stay ahead.

I was speaking to a Vietnamese friend the other day, somebody who came here virtually in her mother's arms. She has a younger sister who also arrived here from Indo-China with the family, and then a brother who was born in Australia. The two girls are doing extraordinarily well. The younger one is a dentist, and according to her elder sister, earning a filthy amount of money. They have both worked and studied hard. How is your brother? We are a bit worried about him. Why are you worried about him? We are not sure he is not becoming too Australian. What do you mean by that? Well, he has never known his country of origin, he has never known what we escaped, except as part of history. He thinks the good life will always be there and we don't think he works hard enough, that is why we think he is too Australian.

There is some kind of a message in that. It is possible to be too complacent, to take things for granted, to really believe

that good times will continue without end. The secret is to know that the good times can continue, but they won't continue automatically, they will continue because of the effort and the ingenuity, the courage and the capacity of Australians. In my view, to achieve that, education is the best and most important investment that this country can make.

I am not sure that our governments understand this message adequately. Over the last 20 years, governments have actually withdrawn from the funding of education and much of that has been replaced by dependence upon full fee paying students from overseas. That, I believe, is a policy that is not sustainable over the longer term. Government investment in education is still an essential ingredient of maintaining quality education. In my own state, I understand that the University of Melbourne gets about 23% of its total funding from governments. Stanford and Harvard, with far greater endowments than the University of Melbourne, get over 40% of their money from governments.

If universities are to continue to grow in stature, in strength, and serve the needs of this country, governments are going to have to make a greater investment in education.

That is something for the future. For today, you can be extraordinarily proud of what you have already achieved. I hope the future holds for you, everything that you would want, everything you wish to work for and that you find challenging, rewarding, productive, imaginative and innovative careers in the years ahead. The world is waiting for you.

I would like to remind you of an often repeated quotation that was used by my political opponents, "*Life was not meant to be easy.*" I never minded when that quote was used because for so many Australians, life is not easy, and for

many, those few words were a recognition of reality. In any case, it was not the full quote. It came from the old man in Bernard Shaw's play *Back to Methusaleh* "*Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.*"

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