Mr Peter Blatch OAM
Guest Speaker

Monday 14 December 2015 – 11.00am

Occasional Address to graduates of Arts, Education and Law

Chancellor
Deputy Vice Chancellor
Members of the official party, academic staff
Families and friends and
Our graduates of 2015

Congratulations to our newest cohort of professionals who are graduating in arts, education and law.

Well, what a day. You have made it here, in cap and gown and finally, with that piece of paper. It’s a time to celebrate and to thank all those who have helped along the way. Graduations are special. I remember mine well.

1973 was a time of great economic boom but world unrest. We let our hair grow and marched in the streets legally and illegally as laws changed, to create a better world and to right the wrongs. In our long hair, flared trousers and platform shoes we addressed the inequities of the day.

I always wanted to be a teacher… the lower tertiary score that a male needed was appealing but it was really because I enjoyed helping and coaching others. It started early. My mate from age of four, was a bit different to me although I didn’t realise (today he would be called intellectually impaired). We played and learnt together, helping one another through our childhood and adolescence. He was really good with games and girls and I was good with geography and grammar…but he had to go to a different school, just like that scene in Forrest Gump.

It was in my first year of teaching that I realised my work was my passion. I’ve been lucky. I have always loved my job, whether it be as a teacher, principal, director or public servant; whether it be with volunteers, not for profit groups or governments. I have thrived on the challenges of working with children, their families and colleagues; being there at those lightbulb moments when you have helped someone to actually ‘get it’. And sometimes it’s the simplest things that make the strongest impact. At my retirement farewell recently a past student who was born blind and now the CEO of a large company, spoke of the difference I made in her life, by teaching her to look towards the voice of the person speaking. It’s a simple concept that few of us really need to be taught but obviously was so meaningful to her.
Graduating in the seventies presented many opportunities and challenges. While education was ‘freely’ available, if a child had an IQ score below 70, he or she was denied a state education but could receive training through a health institution. To our law graduates, parents of children who were deaf or blind were mandated by that same education act to send their child to school— one specific residential school at Annerley regardless of where they lived. If they did not do this they would be fined.

History shows the baby boomer graduates made a difference. By implementing ideologies of mainstreaming, integration and inclusion, it is now the legislated right of every student, to receive their education in their local school and in accord with parent choices. But addressing inequity continues to present challenges and despite significant advances, there are still many issues and many people experiencing unfair disadvantage.

It is important that each of us, whatever our vocation, cares and commits. Times come when we must take a stance and state our position in both private and public arenas, be it the home, office, classroom, court room, university, our state, country or world. We must comfort those who are challenged and challenge those who have become too comfortable.

You need to follow your passion. If you aren’t aware of it yet, make it your priority to discover it. To be really effective in your job, you need to enjoy what you are doing. Don’t ignore what excites you— make what excites you, your career.

It’s never too early to specialise, to focus on what really matters to you. When your passion is your priority you’ll meet others who share your ideas, who’ll challenge your thoughts, who’ll be exciting to work with, and will push you on. You will continue to be a lifelong learner. They will help you plan, identify, critique and celebrate your successes and help you achieve things greater than you ever imagined. Passionate people take pride, are creative and enthusiastic. They must be ethical and courageous. Passionate people make a difference. I have followed my passion. I hope you are able to follow yours.

So, as this recent retiree moves from leading principals and teachers in schools to leading my first grandchild to her prep class next year, I offer the following advice, regardless of your qualification or vocation.

Each of you here today, has been provided a unique opportunity, created by your own hard work, your education to date and the support received from others. Use this well. Find and follow your passion, share your learnings, care for and assist others along the way, so that we will have an even better community - an Australia and a world that each of us wants our children and grandchildren to inherit.
Graduates, I challenge you to embrace the Griffith motto - Know More, Do More!

I wish you well.