

“BUILDING A BETTER WORLD”

OCCASIONAL ADDRESS BY THE CHANCELLOR

PROF. PETER SHERGOLD AC

HONG KONG AWARD CEREMONY

29TH MAY 2011

I am proud to present this occasional address this morning. I take pride in the achievements and the extraordinary potential of students recognised in this ceremony. I take pride, too, in the partnership that has grown between the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and Hong Kong Baptist University. This year marks 20 years of evolving academic collaboration between our two institutions. I acknowledge with gratitude the vital role that has been played by Dr Simon Wong, Dean of the School of Continuing Education.

You have already heard too much of me. What you do not yet know is why I was so pleased to be asked to become the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of UWS. It is important to understand why I am honoured to wear the gown of the Chancellor of the University and why, in truth, I feel the weight of the responsibilities that it places upon my shoulders.

I know that most graduates being honoured today have never attended the campuses of the University of Western Sydney. To you, and your family and friends who join today's celebration, I want to convey one strong message. The mission of the University – your University - is distinctive. Of all Australian universities it has done most to open up opportunities to those who would not, in an earlier generation, have enjoyed the chance to benefit from higher education. The University serves a dynamic region – indeed its 6 campuses lie at the heart of what is increasingly termed Sydney's 'second' city – but beneath the economic growth and demographic diversity sits a part of Australia whose opportunities have not yet kept pace with the rising aspirations of its people.

Western Sydney, at least in aggregate, has lower incomes, lesser education and more poorly skilled labour than the Sydney metropolis as a whole. It is more ethnically diverse, providing a new home to large numbers of migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. It is more dependent on welfare support. It has more Aboriginal Australians. UWS stands as a beacon of hope, offering access to students who come from families of low socio-economic status, from which no-one has ever studied at university. It matches the ambitions of those who live and work in Western Sydney. We are a university committed to growth ... and social justice.

This, however, represents only one side of the coin that is our mission. The other side is the University's role as a window on the world and a gateway to educational excellence. That is why we focus so much effort on delivering teaching excellence and developing areas of world-class research. The School of Nursing is a key part of that strategy as I hope has been apparent to those of you, our graduates from 2010 and 2011, whom we recognise today. I can say, without hint of rhetorical extravagance, that under Dean Rhonda Griffiths the School lays claim to providing the finest nursing education in Australia. Its innovative approaches are recognised globally. The collaboration with Hong Kong Baptist is a crucial element in that goal.

Our overseas students, and our relationship with overseas universities, are not just a means of delivering our education on a global stage. You represent a key part of bringing the world to the people of Western Sydney. Our international connectedness broadens the perspective of students doing it tough in Blacktown and Bankstown, Penrith and Parramatta. It is proof positive that their future opportunities are not circumscribed by circumstance. For them, as for you, the future is a different place, full of risks and challenges but accessible to ambition. Through university education they, like you, become citizens of the world.

You, then, are important to the growth of the University of Western Sydney and the delivery of its mission. I want you to feel part of the UWS family, bound by a common sense of purpose to a far-distant campus.

The post-graduate qualifications that you hold in primary health care or clinical leadership and, far more importantly, the quality of the education to which they bear testimony, provide great opportunities both here in Hong Kong and beyond. You are, and will become, the professional leaders of a fast-evolving health care system.

The degrees that you hold bring significant benefits both to you and to society. Your role in preventing illness, providing medical care and support and promoting wellbeing, generates large-scale public benefits. They have social value to government and to the individual citizens to whom you delivery a higher quality of life. You offer, in the broadest sense, a public service.

Your degree also bestows benefits on you as an individual. It increases lifetime income for you and your family. It provides 'psychic wealth' – the satisfaction that comes from having a job with meaning that makes a beneficial difference to the lives of others. You have a vocation, not just a career, of which your parents, spouses and children can be proud.

Your academic education then brings benefit both to society and to you. It's a powerful combination. Is it sufficient? I trust not.

Rather, I hope that as you reflect on the education you have enjoyed and the advantages it has bestowed, that you think of those less fortunate. You are well placed, if you have the will and determination, to contribute more to civil society in a hundred different ways. Perhaps it will be through joining community organisations, or donating to charitable causes or volunteering your time and energy to socially responsible endeavours. Whether as a joiner, a donor or a volunteer you can apply your skills (and increasingly your experience) to make the world a better place whether in the area of welfare, culture or the environment. My guess is that many of you are already doing so.

I am involved in too many things. Yet among the most rewarding are the jobs I undertake for no financial reward. I have chaired a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to improve rural leadership in Australia and presently serve on the board of two other community organisations that seek to remediate Indigenous disadvantage and provide financial support for bright and committed Australians to study overseas. I also serve pro bono as the Chancellor of UWS. I'm not sure that our Vice-Chancellor, Jan Reid, intends our university to be non-profit but that, in the area of public

education, is the inevitable location of our bottom line. It's something that public universities around the world share.

It is commonplace to describe community activities as 'giving back to society'. That's not quite how I see them. My motives are far less pure. I'm not sure they are driven by either religious faith or secular ethics, still less a sense of spiritual enlightenment. I simply want to contribute to building a world in which I wish to live and to hand it on a better place to future generations.

This may seem a tough and unrealistic expectation for those of you already struggling to balance work and personal life. I know it's a difficult juggling act. I know, too, that the scale of global problems can make individual actions seem insignificant and pointless. That, I think, is the foundation of cynical inaction, driven by lack of vision or fear of failure. It breeds a sense of helplessness. The University of Western Sydney and Hong Kong Baptist University share a common belief that every single student can make a difference. So, I think, do you. Act on that impulse.

The challenge, I suspect, is not that of balancing work and family and community. Our lives are not neatly segmented. We need to integrate the way we live and, using the education we have gained, live it to the full. That, I know, is what many of you are doing already. It is the path to moral integrity and personal fulfilment. It is a destination to which your university learning has contributed.

I wish you well. The University of Western Sydney is proud of your achievements. I hope that you will help us to follow your success – in employment, at home and in the community. And I hope that our two universities will continue to collaborate, so that this will be for me the first of many ceremonies of academic achievement in Hong Kong.