

Chancellor, Principal, members of the University, Guests and fellow new graduates. First let me say that it is always a pleasure to visit Scotland, I spent formative years here albeit on the east coast, and both my daughters were born here.

I have the pleasant task on behalf of my fellow honorary graduates to thank the University of Glasgow for recognising us with honorary degrees. It is a real honour for us all to be recognised in this way, and thank you too for the dinner yesterday and lunch today. What is impressive for me about the honorary graduates is the range of individuals that the University has recognised: they include a comic book artist, an economist, a theatre director, a technology related businessman, an NHS executive, an airport chief, and even a scientist. It is an eclectic group of people and I am proud to be one of their company. So congratulations to all of them, and thanks once again to the University for all your hospitality and for all the staff who have made this such a memorable occasion, particularly the orators.

As this is a celebration of a University, I also wanted to say a few words about “What universities are for?” ending with something political. But do not despair, I promise to be short.

Universities are places for scholarship, for research, for teaching. They aim to extend human understanding through disciplined intellectual enquiry by research and scholarship, a search for truth generating explanations of the world and of ourselves using reliable observation, experiment, and coherent thinking. High quality research and scholarships can only thrive in a place where there is freedom: freedom of ideas, of opinion, of thought. And for universities to work effectively they must also be embedded in a free society.

The generation and transmission of knowledge, through scholarship, research, and teaching is a public good, central to our culture and our civilisation. Research also creates new possibilities, that can provide economic, social, health and other utilitarian benefits. Research shares common values and practices, whether at the discovery or application ends of the research spectrum. Throughout this spectrum research is built on a respect for reliable and reproducible data, a sceptical approach, an abhorrence of

falsification, a commitment to the pursuit of truth. Research discovering new knowledge thrives on the ability of an individual to pursue research of interest to them, that engages their passion, and that releases their creativity.

Turning to the education mission of universities it is important to recognise that teaching is not simply the transfer of information from teachers to students. It requires students and their teachers to grapple with uncertainty, to wrestle with deep issues and contexts, to question interpretations, to be sceptical about both orthodoxy and also their own ideas. Robert Hutchins, President of Chicago University, summed this up well when he said “Education is not to reform students, or to amuse them, or even to make them expert technicians. It is to inflate their intellects, to teach them to think.” And to achieve all of this universities requires scholars who are experts (listen Mr Gove), who embrace the values of accuracy, honesty, consistency and knowledge in depth. Please Mr Trump also take note, so we can be spared any more of your Trump twitter twaddle. Universities need to counter unsubstantiated opinion and to uphold the values that liberal societies cherish, that are central to civilisation and to the progress of humanity. We are desperately in need of these values in the UK in the coming months and years, as we try and make the best of BREXIT. BREXIT, in my view, is a colossal failure of our political leadership built on mistruth, a backward looking vision, and political opportunism and arrogance. Perhaps given the general election result we have the opportunity to make things better, and universities have a critical role and need to fully engage in the debate. And this, ladies and gentlemen is also what universities are for.

With that personal thought I finish, thanking you once again for making us all honorary graduates of this fine and ancient University.