

Class of 2020 Graduation celebration

24th February 2022

Graduate Speaker Dr Percy Wace

Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, friends, family and fellow graduates.

We are here today to celebrate the result of years of hard work. Firstly, I would like to say a massive congratulations to all of the graduates of 2020 for achieving degrees in challenging and unprecedented circumstances.

It may seem an age ago that we finished our degrees, but I know that we are all grateful to be able to share this belated celebration with those we love. I am sure I speak for all of us graduating today when I say thank you to our parents, partners, friends and families who have supported us throughout our journeys, not just in our studies but beyond. Without their support, guidance, and the sacrifices they have made, many of us would not have made it this far.

I would also like to thank all the staff within the School of Medicine, as well as all of the tutors and mentors who have been so important in our medical education. They, and the course itself, prepared us for what we were about to face not just in terms of medical knowledge, but in communication and working as part of the NHS. We were fortunate to be trusted to start work early in the pandemic, which was a huge learning opportunity and something for which I am very grateful to the Dean and School of Medicine.

Every graduate today should be immensely proud of their achievement, and the huge amount of work and dedication that went into their degree. But while it is true that we all worked hard at university, I would hope that late nights at the Harold Cohen are not anyone's enduring memories of Liverpool. Some of my best memories have been spent in student halls, Smithdown houses, concert square and Seel Street. I have been lucky to have been involved with the amazing Liverpool Medical Students Society, the LMSS, which has given me incredible opportunities including appearing on national news and the radio with two of my closest friends, 'performing' on stage at the O2 academy, as well as countless other fantastic events.

On my first day living in Liverpool, five hours from home, as my mum drove back from student halls, I sat in my new room alone and panicked: 'what if I don't belong here?' 'what if I don't make any friends?' I sat there feeling worried for a short while before there was a knock on the door. The friendly face from the room next door greeted me with 'Hi mate, I'm Olly, fancy hanging out with a group of us in another block?' Just like that, my fears melted away and university had started. Nearly 8 years on, funnily enough Olly still lives next door to me, and is still one of my best mates, although we have moved on from Roscoe and Gladstone halls. Forget the Krebs cycle, the lifelong friends I have made are what defined university for me, and

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I think that is true for all of us. University has marked the transition into adulthood, and we have all been incredibly lucky to share the experience with people in this room.

Many of us have now been working for a year and a half. As healthcare professionals, we have the privilege of being able to look after people at their most vulnerable, in an environment full of motivated people from different backgrounds.

However, leaving university and starting in the real world can be a challenging time, after having spent those years in a bit of a uni bubble. Now more than ever it is essential to look after our mental health and that of those around us. We have all had rubbish days at work where the stress can get too much, and we all need the support of friends, family and loved ones. So, I encourage all of you to reach out for help when you need it, and not to go through it alone. Whether that's chatting to a friend, speaking to a trusted mentor or seeking advice from a professional, it's completely normal to need help sometimes. And it goes both ways - be the one to reach out and check on your mates. It is easy to lose touch with your classmates, and I have been guilty of it myself, but take today as a chance to restart conversations and continue them forward.

We've come so far and we've reached so high. From my first day moving into halls right next to Penny Lane, this city has been an incredible place to be a student. The opportunity to study in such a vibrant, diverse and friendly city is something that I hope we all made the most of. And if you have moved away to new and exciting challenges, Liverpool will always be home. Never forget where you've come from.

To quote a key influence for many of us growing up, Paul Cattermole from S Club 7:

"The sky's the limit you can reach your goal. No-one knows just what the future holds. There ain't nothing you can't be, there's a whole world at your feet."

I would like to once again say thank you to those who have been so integral to our journeys, on behalf of all the graduates of 2020. Congratulations again, and I wish you all the best of luck in whatever you go on to do.

