# John Scally Honorary Graduate Speech

Good morning everyone.

To those graduating today, I sat where you are just over 36 years ago as you've just heard,

and here I am back again, older and a bit wiser, maybe don't know. I'll leave you to judge that after four and a half minutes, and pleased to say a few words on behalf of everyone graduating this morning.

Now, I'm sure you've got your own stories of acts of kindness and support that made a difference to your university experience. That's one of my abiding memories of Strathclyde, no one batted an eye when I asked what cottage cheese was in the Student Union cafe on the first day, and neither did my history dissertation supervisor, when I asked him in fourth year what a PhD was just before I applied for one at Cambridge, I wasn't the only one to be the first in my family to go to university and Strathclyde took that kinda thing in its stride absolutely.

My choice of university career and much else was made by working it out and asking questions, some of them a bit better than the two that I've just mentioned. Before I went to university, I'd worked as a trainee psychiatric nurse, a labourer, a school cleaner, an auctioneer's assistant that was a very brief career move and a chicken factory worker. I'm not sure how much of those experiences prepared me for university or for a career as a librarian, eventually I became National Librarian, but I think that it helped. I got promoted three times in that chicken factory in Amsterdam when I was 19 I'll have you know, and that remains my record for promotions within an institution.

As I look back today and think of you starting off, there are three things that have really helped me in my career in life. The first is resilience. The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. I learned about resilience in my late teens and twenties and responded by trying to rely on myself and build my own mental strength and determination. I have benefited enormously from taking this notion of resilience to heart.

Next, and even harder, would be recognise good advice and take it, no matter how hard that advice is to hear and act upon. I found this so difficult and painful at times because sometimes that advice, the best advice, is straight to the point. It's often not wrapped up in fluffy language. Look for it, look out for it. It'll come your way I'm sure. Be indignant and cringe quietly, at first, at least, and then act on it.

My father was a Glasgow bricklayer and he expressed serious concerns when I was in first year at Strathclyde that I was still at the school as he described her. But eventually he advised me to try and earn a living from the neck up.

And the single most important action I've taken in my personal and professional life is to see the value in books and reading. Now, that's not a stunning revelation from a recently retired librarian, I admit, but it has worked for me. I found my way to Glenburn public library in Paisley where I grew up when I was about eight years old. That was in 1969. The library had opened a few years before that. It was a place where you could take down a book and time travel to the Arctic Circle and read about Lemmings, lemmings or marvel at the construction of wooden frigates during the Napoleonic Wars, or find out about Mary Queen of Scots. And that was me hooked for life. And as I got older, there were all those wonderful novels to read. Thrillers, adventures, every conceivable, give every conceivable genre from Treasure Island to Pride and Prejudice, to Homage to Catalonia, which I'm reading at the moment. A book can be your own personal decompression chamber. A way to be educated, of course, we're all graduating this morning, but also a place to be entertained and diverted, diverted away from other things, the pressure of a job or other things, and to improve your vocabulary and writing style.

So, whatever you do, and wherever you go after graduating, always have a book on the go.

Thank you and good luck to everyone graduating today.