# Sir Patrick Vallance Honorary Graduate speech transcript

Sir Harry Burns

It is with great pleasure, therefore Principal, with the authority of the Senate, I ask you to confer upon Sir Patrick, the degree of Doctor of Science, honoris causa

Professor Sir Jim Mcdonald

Patrick, I create you Doctor of Science honoris causa. We are deeply proud to have you associated with us. Well done and welcome to the Strathclyde family. Thank you very much indeed.

Sir Patrick Vallance

Thank you very much indeed. It's a great honor to be here. Uh, I'm very fond of this university and as, uh, Sir Harry has said, have had indirect links with it through the program in chemistry, uh, from GSK linked to Strathclyde.

But I'm particularly pleased to be here today because it's such a special day when you graduate. It's just fantastic. It's a moment to look for the future. And I look out here and I just think, great. We've got loads of really bright young people coming on. We're gonna be okay. And today for you is the culmination of years of hard work. And my guess is a little bit of fun as well along the way.

For me, and my brother was particularly cross about this because he qualified, he graduated from Strathclyde, uh, in 1979. And when he heard I was getting an honorary degree, he just thought that was deeply unfair. He'd had to work really hard and I just got given one. So I, I'm particularly pleased actually to rub his nose in it today.

Um, there is going to be a massive demand for your skillsets, chemistry, engineering, two great subjects that have such implications, right the way across society, and the pace of change is enormous. And that pace of change is gonna be one that you are going to not only keep up with, but lead and AI, which has been a lot in the news recently, is going to disrupt all sorts of things. And it's going to disrupt jobs and job markets, but it's gonna do it in a way that creates something rather special, which is it's going to be more easy to do the jobs which only humans can do. In other words, that bit which you add the biggest value in, is going to be the greatest value in the era of AI because it'll remove all sorts of other things that actually humans don't need to do. That can be done by machine.

And when I look back and think about, um, my career, I've had really four different careers. One in medicine seeing patients, one as an academic, uh, and one in industry as a leader of research and development and one in government.

And I learned different things in all of those and the different things I learned became important for each of the other steps. And why do I tell you that? Well, I, I say that because the graduates today, um, many of you are going to live to be over a hundred. That's what's happened to demographics in this country. Life expectancy is increased and you will live to be over a hundred. That means you won't be retiring at 60. That means you're very likely to have multiple careers. And I think multiple careers are going to be the norm. And therefore raise questions about how you start choosing what you want to do with this great knowledge and skill that you've learned over the past period. And, um, seems to me when I think about why I chose certain things to do, there were a few things that were important. They may not be the same for you, but maybe some will resonate.

The first is purpose does the job or the area thing that actually have a purpose that you believe in, that you think is important for society. The second is, is it interesting? I mean, you've actually gotta get outta bed every morning and do these things so it better be interesting and something that you feel excited to do. And the third is, it's really good if you can work with nice people. And those three things have been guiding principles for me. And you, you may think about it and think actually the last of those, I definitely didn't always get a hundred percent right. And it's impossible to get it a hundred percent right.

Um, when you go into the workplace with these fantastic knowledge that you've learned over your time here and your qualifications don't underestimate your potential, you actually will bring things to all sorts of environments. And, and, and one of the things I'm deeply impressed about with chemists is you are fantastically clever across all sorts of different areas. I know that cause I've seen it in practice, but your potential and your impact is much bigger than you think it is.

And therefore, don't be afraid to speak up. Don't be afraid to give your opinion. Don't be afraid to contribute. Cause your contributions will actually make a difference and you should build on it and use what you know. And don't assume as you get more senior that somebody else is doing something that guides what you do. Sometimes they aren't. Sometimes it's just up to you to determine what the path is and what the right thing is.

So my message there is about grasping things and actually doing what you think is right and important and getting on with it. And I want to just make two comments about things which I think are important. One, definitely important and one somebody once told me. So the thing that I think is important is whatever job or career or area you go into, it's highly unlikely that it will be totally dependent on an individual. It's much more likely it'll be dependent on teams. And one of the things that's crucial for teams is diversity and valuing the diversity from all sorts of different areas, whether that's ethnicity, whether it's gender, whether it's, um, scientific discipline, whether it's different areas of arts, humanities, whatever it is, that diversity is a crucial part of solving problems. And when I think about diversity, and I'm always a bit low to mention this person's name because it's got certain connotations with, um, with the Greek class, which he shouldn't, is not my mentioning it. The person I love more than any in this, in this space is, uh, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. And the reason he's so fantastic is this quote, I think, which is, he said, differences are not meant to alienate or separate. We are different from one another precisely in order to recognise our need of one another. And I think that's a pretty good motto to go with in terms of why diversity isn't a nice to have or an add-on. It's actually crucial to everything we do.

And then the other one was, um, a an ex-boss of mine who made this very simple statement, which, uh, uh, I remember and have taken with me ever since you said it, which is, um, in any job or career or activity, just remember, be really nice to people on the way up because you're gonna meet them again on the way down. Thank you very much.