

Chancellor, distinguished guests, proud families, and above all — graduates,

Thank you for inviting me to be part of today's celebration.

It's a real honour.

Though I must admit, standing here in front of a sea of university graduates is slightly intimidating... because I didn't even finish Year 11!

So if nothing else, I'm living proof that you can still find yourself in interesting places — even if you didn't quite pay enough attention in high school.

I've seen firsthand how important it is to have a university right here in our region. My wife Elle made the decision to return to study midwifery — and being able to do that here in Mount Gambier made all the difference.

Just like many of you, she could chase her passion without having to leave her home, her family, or her community behind.

That's the real power of having a university in the Limestone Coast — it gives people the chance to grow, to succeed, and to make a difference, right here where they're needed most.

And today, each of you is proof of that.

But today isn't about me.

Today is about you — and what comes next.

You have worked hard.

You have achieved something remarkable.

You should be proud.

And I hope you are feeling excited — because the real adventure starts now.

And while you could take your degree and head off to the big city lights...

I want to challenge you to think about staying right here.

In the Limestone Coast.

In our region.

In our community.

You are needed here.

Regional South Australia drives our state.

The regions produce **about 60% of South Australia's exports**.

Our agriculture, forestry, tourism, and manufacturing sectors pump billions into the economy every year.

In fact, if you isolated the Limestone Coast economy, we'd be one of the strongest standalone regions in the country.

Forestry alone contributes around **\$1.2 billion** annually to South Australia — much of it centred right here around Mount Gambier.

You're not just graduating with a degree.

You're graduating with the opportunity to shape the future of the very place you call home.

Whether it's:

- teaching the next generation in our schools,
- providing care in our hospitals,
- building local businesses,
- leading social change,
- or driving research and innovation in fields like forestry and sustainability.

Every one of you has a vital role to play.

And here's the truth:

When people like you stay in the region, it strengthens everything.

- It keeps local businesses alive.
- It brings fresh ideas into our communities.
- It ensures young families have teachers, nurses, social workers, and leaders close to home.
- It inspires the next group of kids — sitting in classrooms across the South East today — to know that they too can achieve something great without having to leave everything they know behind.

I grew up here. I've run my businesses here. I've played gigs here. I've raised my family here. I learnt my life lessons here.

And even when life took me other places, my heart never left.
This place shapes you. And you can shape it back.

So — while I didn't quite earn the right to wear a cap and gown like you...

I can tell you from experience: Success isn't about how far you go from home.

It's about how much of a difference you make, wherever you are.

And there's no better place to make that difference than right here.

Congratulations again. I can't wait to see how you change the Limestone Coast, South Australia, and the world.

Thank you and well done.