

## **Lucy Scott Moncrieff – Honorary Degree Acceptance Speech**

I would first of all like to say thank you very much to the University of Essex for awarding me this honorary degree. It is a great privilege, and I am truly grateful. Secondly, I would like to congratulate all today's graduations who have had to work for the degrees far more than I've had to work for mine.

I had the pleasure of working with Professor Sunkin and some of his colleagues here when I was involved in the administrative justice institute and, on that basis, I know that you will all have received a really excellent and stimulating legal education at Essex.

My task today is to say some inspiring words, which is a bit of a challenge in these very difficult times, but I hope that I may be able to put one or two ideas forward that may help you have as interesting and stimulating future in the law and with the law as your legal education here has been.

I've been a solicitor for 44 years and although it wouldn't be true to say that I've loved every minute of it, I have never regretted my career choice.

Not all of you will choose to become lawyers, but for those of you who do, the profession offers the most enormous scope, because law is everywhere, and therefore there will always need to be people needing help to negotiate it. They could be international corporations or people wanting to buy a house or challenge their assessed welfare benefits assessment.

People in prison are entitled to legal assistance, as are people having immigration problems and people who believe they have been unfairly sacked or discriminated against. You could be in private practice, working in house for a company or charity, for central or local government, for the police or armed forces, or for public services.

What links all these areas of work is that they need to be done; some are more glamorous than others in the eyes of the world, and some are certainly much better

paid than others, but all are important to someone and worth doing, so you can try and please yourself, in the knowledge that whatever you choose will be worthwhile. When you're a lawyer you have to work very hard, and you have to work to a very high standard because people are depending on you to get it right. I think it must be hard to give of your best, day in and day out, when you're not really enjoying what you do, so it's important for your career that you find something you enjoy, as well as being important for your happiness.

I started off as a criminal defence solicitor, and enjoyed it, but then took on a colleagues' clients who were mentally disordered offenders in Broadmoor seeking discharge, and found it much more interesting, so I switched, and have never regretted it.

So, keep an open mind and explore different options if you get an opportunity to do so.

Some of you will decide that you don't want to be lawyers, but you will still have everything that achieving a law degree gives you – clarity of thought, analytical skills, an ability to make reasoned arguments, and a capacity for hard work. These are eminently transferable skills to a wide range of careers and activities, as you will discover as you proceed in life.

The legal profession has changed enormously since I started, not just in terms of its demographics, but also in the range of work that lawyers do. Of course, this isn't surprising when you have a profession full of creative, intelligent people, and it will be lawyers such as yourselves, coming fresh to the profession and looking at it with fresh eyes who will see clearly how things could change for the better. If you look, you will find others enquiring about the things that matter to you and getting together with them may lead to opportunities to develop your ideas.

In my opinion, the overriding issue now in the provision of legal services is affordability. Despite all the advances in information technology, it's still the case that very many people can't get decent legal advice of the price that they can afford, and with the evisceration of legal aid, this leaves many people in dire straits.

I reckon that most people come into law because they're interested in justice and want to be part of providing justice. You may find yourself working in a branch of the which doesn't immediately appear to offer opportunities to fight for justice, but you can still do so by getting involved in pro bono activities, through your day job, or in your locality, and related volunteering, such as being police station visitors, school governors and charity trustees.

And I wish you the very best for the future.

: