

## Paul Hardaker – Honorary Degree Acceptance Speech

Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor, distinguished colleagues, thank you for this real honour. It's particularly special for several reasons. I spent such enjoyable and memorable times here which were really formative years for me, and also because Essex is founded on a real belief in innovation in education and research and for which I have a long and enduring admiration for. And Graduands, many congratulations to all of you; it's also a privilege for me to be able to share your day.

I am getting to the end of my career in science, and it seems like only yesterday that I was starting out; in fact I remember well arriving in the car park with my parents dropping me off in fresher's week feeling very unprepared for what was ahead. I have always felt lucky to have found my passion early in life. Later on, I was lucky enough to find another important passion of a very understanding partner. Some of you might be here because you are following your passion, some of you might still be looking for it and that's ok too, but I hope in time you will all be able to follow that with the same opportunities that I have had. When you leave here people will try to label you or put you in to a box – let the things that you are passionate about be what define you.

This university is founded on the fundamental principles of inclusive education, and I try to spend what time I can these days working to make sure as many people as possible also have that opportunity. Education is a real gift of opportunity, which not everyone has. So, I hope you have the chance today in this lovely occasion to say thanks to parents, family or whoever has supported you and helped you in this. I also hope you will make the most of it and push the boundaries of that learning - take that opportunity out for a spin.

I sit on lots of appointment panels these days and see lots of young people who have done great things in their studies and in their early careers, but who have not really tested the boundaries of what they can achieve. Don't fear it as it's part of becoming the best you can be.

I've had to work with the challenges of dyslexia through my studies and working life, so in that spirit I thought I would do something that challenges me, which is to read in public, so hope you will bear with me. It's a beautiful piece of poetry by W B Yeats, it was short-listed to be on the gold disk that was put on the voyager spacecraft, but sadly it didn't make it. And it goes something like this (hopefully!):

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,

Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

So, dream big all of you, dream often, and the rest of us will try our best to tread softly on them.  
Thank you again for this wonderful honour and congratulations to all of you on all you have  
achieved – have a wonderful day.