

A message from the Principal and Vice-chancellor of the University of the Highlands and Islands, Professor Todd Walker

Hello, my name is Todd Walker. I am the Principal and Vice-chancellor of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and as you can probably tell by my accent that I'm not from Scotland. In fact, I should probably be saying to you 'G'day, hello graduates'

I am Australian. This time last year I was living and working in Australia. I never thought for a moment that a year on, I'd be standing here in Scotland addressing you as your principal and vice-chancellor, having gone through one of the longest journeys in my life, both in distance and time.

And I'm sure you also never thought that you'd have spent the last year of your course, studying in such really challenging circumstances overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But you did it! You've reached the end of your studies and completed your qualification during one of the toughest times in history. And certainly, as a student you have faced. I'm incredibly proud of what you've achieved. You faced a seemingly impossible task – but you kept on going through a pandemic; you've kept moving forward, and you've kept your head up and you've kept looking ahead.

And that is one of the testaments you should always hold near to your heart as a graduate of the University of the Highlands and Islands. And during all that time and in no doubt, you've had hurdles put in your way from lockdowns to family and friend pressures to money struggles and illness or bereavement.

I know this has been quite a time for us all of us. But we're here. All your determination, focus, enthusiasm, and creativity have paid off. Well done.

All of your hopes and dreams lie ahead of you. Well done.

Take a moment to think about all the people that have helped you to get this point in your life. Whether it be your tutors, lecturers, or those who you will have seen online or in person, if you were lucky enough. But also think about the staff who worked behind the scenes to support you with other things like finances, IT, library resources and, most importantly, your health and wellbeing.

We know it is all these people that have worked tirelessly to make your study experience the best it can be. And as such I do want to thank you for giving us the feedback in the national student satisfaction surveys. You ranked us very highly and on behalf of all the staff, we thank you.

No matter what you do now or where you go with your choices in the future, please remember that all those people are still here for you, and we will always have your back.

And, in the future, if you are looking to improve your skills or knowledge or even start a new career, I'd like you to reach out and have a chat to one of our career teams. You just never know,

it might be so good for you to re-engage with us and develop your career even further. So, from all of us to all of you and to congratulate you on the work you have done.

You are amazing and I know this is just the beginning of your journey.

Congratulations with your achievements.