

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Wednesday 11 December 2019, 5.00pm

Dr Liz Walker
CEO, RSPCA Victoria

Today is a special day. It's special because it's a day that is both a beginning and an end. It's the end of your time pursuing a Bachelor's degree, DVM, Master's or PhD at the Faculty of Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences and it's the beginning of 'what comes next'.

'What comes next' is both exciting and scary, both happy and sad. 'What comes next' is a new beginning in further study or a career and that is both exciting and scary. 'What comes next' is making new friends and saying goodbye to some old ones and that is both happy and sad.

When I was a kid, I loved animals. Loved being around them, near them, with them - the wild and domestic, the big and the small, even the more polarising animals like spiders, rats and lizards. I loved animals and, as soon as I realised you could get paid to work with animals, then that was what I was always going to do.

And because, like all of you, I was a bit of a science nut, I became a vet. The original plan was to be a vet -in-practice forever, maybe with my own little clinic constantly around, near, and with animals – big ones, little ones and even the odd ball ones. So, I started as a Vet, but then 'what comes next' decided I was a sales and marketing executive. Then 'what comes next' made me the General Manager of a veterinary pathology business, then the CEO of an animal hospital, and currently 'what comes next' has me as the CEO of RSPCA Victoria. I don't know 'what comes next'... but I do know that it will still have me constantly around, near, and with animals – just like when I was a kid.

'What comes next' has a way of helping you fulfil your dreams – it just tends to do it in unexpected ways.

Now, some of you may be sitting here thinking that you have 'what comes next' all figured out. I once sat here thinking that. I thought I was going to be a 'large-animal' vet. I was wrong and you probably are as well.

'What comes next' will be different for everyone and it may well be very different from what you are currently thinking. It certainly was for me. But that's ok.

You will have your plans. You will have your dreams. As a graduate, it's time to start chasing them. In doing so, you will face new challenges and have new opportunities. You will move up, and on, in life. You will continue to learn and mature. You will be constantly confronted with the endless possibilities of 'what comes next'.

But you won't be alone. Just as you have never been alone.

Look around you. Everywhere are people who love you and are incredibly proud of everything you have done so far. In this room are mums and dads, step mums and stepdads, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, grandparents and friends, and the teachers who have guided you and put up with you every step of the way.

Today would be a good day to give them a hug and say thank you because, as much as this is your achievement, it's also the achievement of everyone who cares about you. Look at our smiles, look at the love, look how proud we all are.

Those of us who have followed your journey or been a part of it believe in you. We will be there for you when you need us. We will be there for 'what comes next'. We know that you are ready and that you will make it happen.

So... 'what comes next'?

I don't know. None of us really know, except that we know it will be full of beginnings and ends, happy and sad, scary and exciting. But you're ready, right?

Of course, you are!

As another famous lover of animals, Dr Seuss, would say,

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose."

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

"You are on your way up! You'll be seeing great sights. You'll join the high fliers who soar to great heights."

'What comes next', ladies and gentlemen, is what you decide and what you make of it. Make good choices and make as much of life as you can.

Congratulations to all of the graduates, congratulations to everyone who cares about you, congratulations to the teachers and anyone who might have helped you along the way.

You've done it. You're ready... for 'what comes next'.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

This afternoon the University welcomes Dr Liz Walker as guest speaker.

Dr Walker followed a long and winding career path before she finally found her niche as CEO of RSPCA Victoria. She began work on her doctorate in 1990, a year after she had graduated with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science, the predecessor to the University's Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree.

Three years later, when she ran out of time, money and interest, she began a joyful odyssey that carried her into the world of commerce, and further education with a Masters of Management at Macquarie University.

She spent nearly five years with Bayer Animal Health in several roles, including Marketing Manager, and seven years as General Manager of Gribbles Veterinary Pathology, before identifying that animal welfare was where she wanted to work. That realisation was reinforced during the three years she spent as CEO of Lort Smith Animal Hospital.

Dr Walker believes that changing people's behaviour is key to improving animal welfare. As she says: "I'm here because of the animals but I also really like people."

Please join me in welcoming the CEO of RSPCA Victoria, Dr Liz Walker.