

Betty Boothroyd retirement speech

Contributor: Betty Boothroyd

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But ladies and gentlemen, it's been my privilege to serve The Open University for the past few years and I've enjoyed all of them. Now that my time has come as Chancellor, has come to an end, it's an opportunity to say farewell to you. And I can tell you that when I began, I was more aware of my limitations than at any other stage in my life. Some of you here today may have wondered when I was appointed, what my qualifications were. So did I.

When I was approached about the job, I discussed it, of course, with the Clerk of the House, and he doesn't hesitate, he said "Take it on, but you've enough politics to contend with here at Westminster. Make it clear you will stay out of university politics which can be horrendous at times", - and it was sound advice. Of course I was on much surer ground when I entered Parliament because I was nurtured in politics and made it my life's vocation. While friends, rather more fortunate than I, studied for their degrees, I was knocking on doors, shouting through loud hailer, learning about how Parliament works and kissing babies! But politics you see, was my higher education and my studies were all practical and it took me sixteen years to qualify. If I got something wrong there were plenty of colleagues who were only too happy to let me know about it, not all of them had your tolerance and understanding.

But in persevering, just as our students do, I believe that is the link which has made sense in everything I have tried to do as Chancellor. My background has given me a common bond with our students, a sense of fraternity if you like. Just as they do, I had to learn the right way to tackle difficult subjects before finding the right answers, to appreciate other people's point of view while expressing my own. Above all to enlarge my horizons when a blinkered response was often the easy way out. But the satisfaction of achievement and the recognition that it brings stem in no small measure from the struggle that it requires. You know, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that no students struggle quite so hard as do ours and no university has an esprit de corps to rival ours.