Congratulations, graduates, on your achievement.

Your lives are busy enough – with personal and work commitments – without taking on the added challenge of pursuing a degree. What you’ve accomplished is impressive – not just professionally and academically, but personally as well.

So congratulations also go to family members and friends who helped you juggle responsibilities and enabled you to get here.

I am absolutely delighted to see you advance your careers in the built environment.

I read estate management in university, and since then have worked in construction my entire life.

I love the business – I love working with the people; and I love the fact that what we do actually makes the world a better place. I hope that you the graduates love what you do as well.

And whatever your specialty you are helping to leave a legacy. You bring your own specific and valuable skills to the team.

As you know, it’s a diverse group of people who are needed to turn the concept of a building into the reality.

Unfortunately, we as an industry have not been as collaborative as we should be.

The days of the Master Builder – when one person was architect, engineer and builder – are far behind us. In the past 100 years, we’ve become increasingly specialised. And contractual walls have emerged, effectively separating clients from architects from engineers from builders from facility managers. Let’s be honest about the existence of these walls between us.
But that doesn’t mean we can’t start doing a better job of collaborating and taking down those walls. After all, we’re all on the same team.

We help create and maintain the homes, schools, workplaces, and infrastructures that are essential for a quality of life. We deliver positive experiences for people. What we do really matters.

Buildings keep us safe and healthy. They allow work to get done, commerce to thrive, innovations to bloom. They bring people together and allow society to function. They enable civilisation and culture to exist and persist. They serve practical purposes but also delight and inspire us with their art and majesty.

Don’t forget that we, all of us, will leave a legacy.

So imagine it’s the year 2117. One hundred years in the future. What will people think of the buildings that are built today?

Will they see today’s work as enlightened and progressive, or as cheap and short-termist?

Will they remember this as a time of growing use of digital modelling and other technological improvements, or will they remember cowboy builders who leave behind sub-standard structures?

Will they remember buildings that stood the test of time, or will they remember the Edinburgh schools that had to be demolished before any children were hurt?

Will they remember disasters such as the Grenfell Tower and say that even though the building was built in the 1970s, it was the subsequent maintenance that failed to protect its inhabitants?
These are thorny questions, of course, and history will be the judge. But it is still absolutely vital that we look around us and take responsibility to do whatever we as individuals can to ensure the quality of the built environment.

These questions are not just for those of us in the built environment professions. All professions need to examine the broader societal impact of what they do.

I believe strongly that good business, well done, is good for society.

Business creates wealth that through taxes delivers the investment which, if properly managed by the politicians, leads to a fairer and more prosperous society. At my company’s AGM this year I proudly told our shareholders how much tax we paid during 2016. After all, paying tax is an essential part of citizenship, and companies should not be excluded from this responsibility.

Her Majesty’s Treasury depends on our success. One quarter of the UK government’s tax revenue comes from corporation tax and VAT. That’s value generated by business. Another 20% of the government’s income comes from income tax paid by our employees, and a further 15% in National Insurance contributions.

But it’s not just about taxes. All businesses have an obligation to treat their people fairly, foster their development, invest for the long term, consider environmental impacts, and deliver social value for the communities in which they operate.

Unfortunately, there are too many stories in the press about business people who do not take such responsibilities seriously. But let’s not allow the media to skew our thinking.

Every day, I see examples of people going above and beyond the call of duty, and at Wates we honour many of those people every year in our Chairman’s Awards.

I remember one such person was a chap called Graham, who had noticed that a colleague was struggling to cope with the pressures of work, study, and home
commitments. Such was the extent of the colleague's challenges that it was seriously impacting his performance. Graham took him under his wing, and spent evenings and weekends helping his colleague with college work and mentoring him professionally. Graham helped his colleague build the confidence he needed to complete his studies and turn around his performance at work, impressing many of us in the Wates business. The colleague said that none of this success would have been possible without the selfless kindness of Graham, who asked for nothing. He just wanted to help a colleague in need.

That's just one way one person made a difference. You can, too.

It reminds me of what Theodore Roosevelt once said: “Nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

So my plea to you all is that when you return to routine on Monday morning, keep the higher purpose of our work in mind. Show that you care.

Maintain high standards of integrity in what you do, and what you expect of others. This means holding your employers to account – if you see unethical behaviour or poor quality work, speak up.

As the Chairman of a business that employs four thousand people, I expect this. If your company does not provide the right avenues for you to express your concerns, go to your professional institution. Find a way to be heard.

Be collaborative – don’t just stick to your own silo and say ‘that’s not my job’. Most good things in this world have been created by people who have done more than what they had to do.

Or even if in your job you do not come across any great injustices in the world, or bad working practices… look around you. Is there someone struggling, just like Graham’s colleague was? If so, remember that we’re all on the same team.
In conclusion, congratulations again on your achievement today. I’m proud of what you have done for yourself, your families, and our profession.