

Rector's speech

Doctoral Awards Ceremony

Rector Gunnar Bovim's speech

Doctoral Awards Ceremony 16 November 2018

The Vrimla aula, NTNU Business School

«Dear new doctors, honorary doctors, honoured guests, colleagues, and friends.

Congratulations! Today, we are celebrating the creation of 207 new doctors at NTNU.

You will soon receive your doctoral diplomas, as tangible proof of your accomplishment; the highest academic degree achievable. The knowledge you have acquired and conveyed to society will make a difference. You will play an important role in determining what the society of tomorrow will look like.

A doctorate will also grant authority, and weight, to the opinions you express. Use this responsibility wisely!

As you leave here with your diplomas, you will not just be newly created doctors. You are newly appointed ambassadors; for NTNU, but above all, for knowledge. Knowledge deserves the best ambassadors it can get.

We are currently witnessing a fierce debate over freedom of speech, including at NTNU. This is a good thing! Freedom of speech and academic freedom are fundamental values, which we should defend with every ounce of strength we can muster.

As a University, we are also responsible for fostering an environment that promotes a healthy exchange of views in accordance with one of the core values of NTNU: respect.

Many have quoted: «I stop listening as soon as I hear someone say that they're in favour of freedom of speech, but...».

I would add: We have freedom of expression, AND that means we should exercise it! When we talk about the culture of free expression, its role is not to limit that freedom, but quite the contrary – to stimulate it.

One of the challenges to democracy is the cultural climate we have reached, in which many people choose not to participate. We believe that democracy is robust. But when people are withdrawing from mainstream cultural discourse because the environment is so hostile, we can see that democracy is also vulnerable.

We do NOT need a society where people are afraid to express themselves, or can no longer be bothered to participate in debate. Rather, we need more people willing to participate in the shaping of political thought, and in knowledge-based conversations. We should be cheering for freedom of expression, a culture of expression, and the desire to express oneself.

As for those of you who have become ambassadors for knowledge today: the competence you have developed while studying for your doctorates does not just enable you to express yourself. It gives you the *responsibility* to do so. That responsibility applies to more than just your own specific field. Not least, it is about having a willingness to ask the critical questions - to challenge received truths.

To challenge - that is the foundation of all we are, and all we stand for, as a University. You will doubtless have noticed the word “Challenge” this autumn. We’ve launched a campaign based around it, because we *want* to challenge - and to be challenged.

NTNU is currently promoting internationalisation, and to that end we have approved an international plan of action to serve as a guide for this strategic platform. Our ambition is for NTNU to significantly strengthen our participation and contribution to the international exchange of knowledge, and to develop a clearer international orientation for all our fields of study.

This week, for the first time, we held NTNU’s Internationalisation conference, under the heading *Knowledge for a better world - Global Competence and Impact*.

Because this is also about realising NTNU’s vision of knowledge for a better world.

The global challenges the world is facing will require research-based solutions, and combined efforts across international borders. The UN has approved 17 sustainability targets, to which we are committed. These will not be achieved solely within our own borders, but through international cooperation.

Through collaboration with our partners in Europe and the rest of the world, NTNU will contribute to the development of international knowledge fronts. This is also important for Norwegian competitiveness and flexibility.

As former Prime Minister Lars Korvald put it, “*Norway is a small country in the world*”. We represent less than one percent of the world’s research work. Cooperation will

allow us to help ensure that the public sector, not just the business world, has access to the best accessible knowledge in the world.

International collaboration is also a tool for improving quality, developing talent, and creating outstanding research environments. In this context, *mobility* is important. Every doctoral candidate at NTNU should be part of an international research community.

Being part of such a community is to be a small, but important, part of something bigger. The doctoral work you have carried out is just that: *a small, but important, part of something bigger.*

Like *Vegar Ottersen*. He is researching something very small indeed, namely nanofibers in plants. These fibers could replace plastic, one of the most important environmental challenges we are facing.

Anne Vifladt has investigated what creates a good culture of patient safety, and what threatens it. I know that the day I suddenly become a patient myself, I will be glad that somebody has researched that.

Kine Norheim has discovered important factors in how leadership can influence the will to innovate in corporate culture.

Øyvind Ødegård has demonstrated how underwater robotics can give us completely new insights into the ocean floor.

So, we might ask: what will this robotisation really mean for society? *Roger Andre Søraa* has been researching just that.

A small, but important, part of something bigger.

A few weeks ago, I was in India. While I was there, I saw an advertisement: "*Young enough to be brave, old enough to be smart*". It occurred to me that this could be a good description of NTNU. It is absolutely a description of all of you!

Nobody achieves a doctorate without being both smart and brave. Hold on fast to that, in the years to come! Use your will to challenge. Use that will to express yourselves. We will be cheering you on - now, and forever.»