

Aalto University
President Tuula Teeri

Address at the Banquet of the Ceremonial Conferment of Doctoral Degrees on 10 October 2014

The significance of scientific research for the success and welfare of a nation is understood around the world: emerging economies invest in research in the hope of it increasing their wealth in the long term. Although Finland has been among the top countries for a long time, global competition is putting our level of knowledge and competence to the test time and again. We can improve our standing in the global competition for jobs after the recession, if we continue our determinate investment in research, knowledge and competence.

How to build a knowledge society? We talk about knowledge and facts but it is only rarely that we stop to think about their definitions. How do we know that something is the way it is claimed to be? What kind of action produces reliable knowledge?

Scientific research produces knowledge. When building a knowledge society, we must be able to distinguish knowledge from notions, beliefs and opinions. In the course of centuries, science has generated well-established methods for verifying data and knowledge: theories become facts when they have been tested with scientific methods; when the object of study has been carefully, repeatedly and critically observed; when experiments have been made to ensure the reliability of observations, and the results have been assessed in the light of earlier observations.

It is at a university, under the guidance of experienced peers, that you learn to become a scientist; the doctoral dissertation is the scientist's driving licence. During doctoral training, students learn scientific thinking and methodology. Not anyone gets the mandate to teach at a university: professors are carefully selected and their competence is continuously assessed in a variety of ways. Under the guidance of competent scientists, the university educates new generations of researchers and experts who once graduated, contribute to building the knowledge society. Doctoral education provided by universities is thus at the very heart of the knowledge society.

Distinguished new doctors

You have just passed the researcher's driving test, congratulations! You are important pillars of the information society and play a key role in producing new knowledge. Competitiveness is born out of the ability to produce such new knowledge and competence that others do not have; if we copy others, we are always lagging behind.

The first Ceremonial Conferment of Doctoral Degrees of Helsinki University of Technology was celebrated 80 years ago, with the doctorate in technology then conferred upon 10 doctors. Great progress has been made in the world since then. Universities are faced with high expectations and award more doctorates annually than before; last year, we reached a total of 229 degrees. Tackling the increasingly complex societal challenges requires multidisciplinary collaboration. To put the existing knowledge and competence to use, we need to be able to operate as members of complex networks in collaboration with industry and with other builders of society, both in Finland and internationally.

As stated in the Aalto University values, Aalto fosters a passion for exploration and courage among its students and researchers. Our national mission is to promote Finland's success and to make a positive impact on Finnish society, its economy, technology, art, design, internationalisation and competitiveness, and to promote the welfare of humankind and the environment through high-quality research and education. This is what you have been trained for during your studies and I wish that the same values and goals will continue to guide your way as you now move forward in your careers.

Distinguished Doctors honoris causa

Today Aalto University is also celebrating 10 new honorary doctors in technology. The dignity of *Doctor honoris causa* is conferred to a learned person whose knowledge and wisdom are considered exemplary, who in their work have promoted the values and principles of the university, and who have made significant contributions to support the positive development of Aalto University. We thank you warmly for your invaluable support and collaboration, and salute your outstanding achievements in the society at large.

Distinguished new doctors

Life may be seen as divided into three parts: the past, present and future. For a long time, doctoral studies have been a part of your present, but they are now a part of your recent past.

When I had received my doctorate, my family and I took a break from everything and went on a holiday because we felt we had earned it. Doctoral studies require effort and investment, and at times, it may feel like your whole family is pursuing a doctorate in one way or another.

The past, present and future are a continuum. When one period comes to an end and you reach a certain milestone, it is worth stopping for a minute to think ahead. You have earned a break. Enjoy it. Be proud of yourselves and look to the future when you are ready for it. We are proud of you.

This is a happy night; let us celebrate your achievement in accordance with the finest academic traditions! On behalf of Aalto University, I once again congratulate our newly conferred doctors and our Doctors honoris causa, and wish you all a lovely evening.