



Lecturer Charlene Vella spoke to yesterday's graduates of parenthood: "Having another human being in your care really puts things in perspective... Malta has a lot of headway to make." Photos: Chris Sant Fournier

'Working parents must receive better support'

Working parents ought to receive more support than just two days of paternity leave for fathers and mothers expected to leave their newborns after just 18 weeks, graduates were told yesterday.

University lecturer Charlene Vella, who only recently received her PhD in Art History from the University of Warwick, spoke of the plight of being a new parent during her oration at the graduation ceremony yesterday evening.

Having started writing the oration prior to the birth of her son, Dr Vella said parenthood was an issue both for her as well as for those "less fortunate with their work conditions".

"I would like to think that all of us here today are intelligent enough to believe in human rights, equality for gender, sexuality, religion, race, but to also understand that there are some issues that require some serious rethinking. And we do not need to go far to realise this.

"As a country, we are currently better off economically than many, but still much worse off than others in the most basic of matters, such as the adequacy of support given to parents of growing families. Having another human being in your care really puts things in perspective.

"One thing I have learnt is that Malta still has a lot of headway to make for new parents: fathers are only entitled to two days of paternity leave, and mothers in full-time employment are to leave their children when they are 14 or 18 weeks old. Other countries manage to provide much more adequate support and allow flexibility to working parents (not just mothers). What we need are the right priorities, the right attitudes and the right minds working on achieving this and other measures that need to be re-evaluated," Dr Vella said.

"As university graduates, you have been taught to question, to be critical and to challenge even the most established



norms and thoughts. You have learnt to set priorities, you have had to keep a positive attitude even during trying times, and you certainly possess the right minds that have enabled you to be here today.

"All this puts you in the most favourable position to be tomorrow's new thinkers, critics and agents of change," she told the graduates.

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*In absentia