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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Following the recent College and MMed examinations, I realise their significance needs to be placed in perspective. In reality they are not an end point in themselves, but just another gate to pass through as we progress in our lives. They have little more importance than Matric and MBChB in our earlier years. The great difference is that having registered as specialists, we are at last free to take control of our futures constrained only by the standards of our profession.

But in the euphoria of qualifying as an orthopaedic surgeon we forget we shall be confronted by further gates through which to progress in our careers. Can we succeed in private practice? If so, where? Is an academic career the answer? Have we an interest in research? Are we teachers? Do we wish to shape the future of our speciality, and if so how? Some of us decide to open only one of these gates, others first one then another as they mature – there is no universally correct path through life, and our choices do not imply success or failure; these we must define for ourselves.

What is true is that examination marks are not in themselves a measure of professional competence nor a predictor of success. A revered baseball coach at Yale who died recently said that the most important things he learnt were those after he knew everything, and many older colleagues would support this view. The examinations soon become past history, obscured by the passage of time, new challenges and new achievements.

On behalf of the SAOA I wish all possible success and happiness to our newly qualified colleagues for this new phase in their lives. The future is yours.

**John Shipley**  
**President: South African Orthopaedic Association**

