

Good evening. こんにちは。

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to tonight's farewell reception for sixteen new JET Programme participants from Victoria who are departing for Japan next month. We have also invited one newly appointed JET participant who is going to Japan in about two months.

This year we have already sent off seven new JET participants from Victoria, so the total number of new Victorian JET participants is currently twenty-four. Last year, only fourteen participants went to Japan from Victoria. In pre-COVID 2019, thirty-six Victorians went to Japan on the JET Programme. It seems that the number of participants is returning but it is taking time with COVID.

I believe many new JET participants will be assigned to schools in rural areas of Japan. You might become one of the first Australians or foreign nationals that young Japanese students will meet. You can help improve their English language skills as well as raise their global awareness to make a difference in their lives. Likewise, I hope you will have a wonderful experience in Japan, explore the local culture of your assigned cities and towns, and make long-lasting friendships.

I would like to ask the new JET participants to do three things when you are in Japan:

First. Learn about Japan! Learn about its culture, language, and people as much as you can;

Second. Know your country well and explain yourself; and

Third. Become a permanent cultural bridge between our two countries. Most importantly, do not forget to contact us and the JET Alumni Association when you return home.

At tonight's function, I hope the new JET participants get a glimpse of Ikebana, Japanese flower arrangement, and Kyudo, Japanese archery. Special thanks to representatives from Ikebana International, Nobuko Kobayashi and Chieko Yazaki and from Melbourne Kyudo-kai, Gavin Downs and Miyuki Chiba for their superb performances tonight. If any of the new JETs is interested in Ikebana or Kyudo after seeing their performances, please keep the passion with you and try them in Japan. On your return from Japan, you can continue to practice them with Ikebana International and Melbourne Kyudo-kai. Of course, our other guests can learn them in Melbourne!

Also tonight, many of the members of the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Melbourne are attending, who might have connections in various locations where the new JET participants are going.

On this occasion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of the supporters and contributors of the JET Programme, including JETAA and CLAIR. I would also like to thank Mr Craig Ondarchie MP and Mr Andrew Cumpston and Ms Susan Coles for their attendance tonight, and their continued warm support of Japan-Victoria as well as Japan-Australia relationships.

Strengthening these relationships cannot be achieved by the efforts of governments only. Grassroots international exchange by people such as the JET participants are imperative to achieve that goal.

Finally, I wish all the new JET participants good health, and I hope that you have a wonderful time living and working in Japan. And of course when you feel lonely, keep in contact virtually with your family members and friends back in Victoria, which will definitely help even though we know that virtual communications are only second-best!

Thank you and take care. 行ってらっしゃい！