

Good evening. こんばんは。

It is my great pleasure to be here tonight to welcome four JET Programme participants who have recently returned from Japan.

First of all, I would like to thank everyone for joining us tonight to celebrate the return of our JETs. I sincerely appreciate your continued warm support to the JET Programme and the Australia-Japan relationship.

To all the returned JETs, welcome back! お帰りなさい and お疲れ様でした! I still remember sending off some of you at the Farewell Reception recently – time sure flies!

From Hokkaido to Kyushu, you have lived in different parts of Japan, and in cities and towns unfamiliar to even many Japanese people. I believe you have made a significant impact (especially a positive one) in your respective workplaces and communities.

I am sure you have come home with countless unforgettable memories of trying local foods you have never seen before, or being featured on the local news! On the other hand, you may have struggled to adapt to the local culture or the workplace or may have had difficulty communicating with people.

In any case, these experiences will become an invaluable asset for all of you going forward. Your knowledge and understanding of Japan and its culture contributes to

building a good Australia-Japan relationship. Our bilateral relationship continues to flourish and there is no doubt that the JET Programme plays an important role in this.

Now, it is with bittersweet feelings to let you know that I will be leaving Melbourne next week. Throughout the past few years, I have had the pleasure of welcoming and sending off more than 100 JETs and I could not be more grateful. It was always wonderful to see the joy and excitement on everyone's faces at Farewell Receptions and to hear about all the adventures and accomplishments at Welcome Receptions. You may have heard of the word ご縁 which roughly means destiny or connections. We believe that when you meet someone, it is driven by fate, not just a mere coincidence. Being able to meet all of you tonight before I leave Melbourne is definitely some kind of ご縁!

This also applies to friends and connections you made during your time in Japan. I hope you will stay in touch and perhaps visit them in the future. I also encourage you to keep your connections with fellow JET alumni and actively participate in JETAA events.

I believe most of the JET returnees attending this reception joined the career seminar at our office this afternoon. I trust those who attended the seminar have gained useful tips and information in navigation to your future careers.

Whichever path you choose, I hope you will continue to be involved in the Australia-Japan relationship.

I would also like to remind you that there are many opportunities to experience Japanese culture in Melbourne.

As some of you may already know, the Japanese Film Festival is returning to Melbourne from the 21st of this month. The JFF line-up is full of variety and I am sure there is something for everyone. This year's opening film is a heartwarming family drama called *Mom, Is That You!?* by veteran director Yoji Yamada. You may have heard of him from the Tora-san series. Unfortunately, I will be missing this year's film festival, but I strongly encourage you all to find some time to see the JFF films!

Lastly, if you are planning to visit Japan next year, I hope you will visit the 2025 World Expo, which will be held in my hometown Osaka!

Thank you.