



Australian Government

---

Chief Scientist

**PROFESSOR IAN CHUBB AC**

**Occasional Address at the University of Melbourne Faculty  
of Science Conferring of Degrees ceremony**

*Ready to commence*

**\*\*\*\*\* CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY \*\*\*\*\***

**5pm**

**Wednesday 16 December 2015**

**Royal Exhibition Building  
Melbourne**

Chancellor, Vice-chancellor, distinguished guests, and graduands.

Let me begin by congratulating all of you graduating today. It is a time for celebration or maybe for relief (especially on the part of your parents and friends). Whichever it is, one thing is for certain: it is the start of the next phase in your lives.

I am mindful of the fact that at Harvard they call this ceremony not a graduation but a 'commencement'. To them, it is less a celebration of the past three or so years of their students' lives than it is a ceremony marking their joining that great community of scholarship - as they put it, it is the *inception of their fully fledged* (academic lives as they predominantly were in those days) *lives*.

I note in passing that Harvard has had fewer commencements than it has had years. It appears that in some years they found it difficult to celebrate through war and plague and on at least one occasion they couldn't find anybody worthy of commencing *any course of action in the world*.

Happily, we have plenty of you here today to join this celebration - all worthy graduates, but also all worthy commencers - ready to go and make your mark - whatever and wherever that may be.

Many of you will stay in Australia, many will go to another country, some will return home. But wherever you are, whatever you do, you will enter that next phase with the confidence that a fine education has instilled in you - and you will know that through your efforts you can make a difference: to the task at hand, to the people around you, to the planet.

If I can adapt a phrase in current widespread use: it is (likely to be) a great time to be a scientist in Australia. We have recently had an

Innovation and Science Agenda announced, and we have a Prime Minister who uses all those words with passion and vigour.

It is important that he does. And it is important that we do, too. It is important that we take advantage of the opportunities now presented. It is important that we all, individually and collectively, make our contribution. Because we must - it is as simple as that.

In Australia, we are regularly told that our economy has to change from one dependent on natural resources to one more dependent on the talents and skills of our people. And while it might not provide all those talents and skills on its own - nothing would be accomplished without science. Remember that as you face the future - remember that whatever you see, read or hear.

I do go along with the notion that Australia has to change - and while we may be nervous about that, we should remember that we have done it before and there is no reason (except lack of will) why we can't do it again.

To be at our best, we need a vision and then coherence and consistency in policy to achieve that vision. I should add that such coherence and consistency has not been a characteristic of our past.

We need leaders and mentors who are not afraid of considered change, but not inclined to just any change that can be labelled as reform. We need ones who consistently remind us that we can do better - in whatever field or profession we choose, and support us as we stretch to improve. We need leaders who themselves adhere to core values and who remind us of their importance even as we change - because they are the principles that underpin our individual and collective contribution to a tolerant, cohesive society.

One of our challenges in education is to prepare graduates for today and today's workforce while at the same time building their capacity to cope with an unpredictable future.

We need graduates who are curious, nimble and not constrained narrowly to the discipline they studied. [The Prime Minister would probably call them agile.] Graduates who can see opportunity in challenge; graduates who understand the value of values, and ethics, and hard work, too.

So given what you have done, what you have achieved, and where you have been, I can be confident you are ready to commence.

Through you, we will develop new and better ways of doing things. Through you we will understand our world better. Through you and your actions, the world will become a better place.

So we do have responsibilities, sure. Not least because there are many people out there who do not have the advantage of your education and who need you and your efforts to improve their lot in life.

But for now, it is time to celebrate. Celebrations are a function of academic life. They compensate for the down times - the lack of time to get the essay or the prac report perfect, the lower mark than you knew you were due or capable of. The hard work.

Back at Harvard, it was noted that: *Our fathers, we may observe, closely associated the thirst for learning and that for beer; at the 1703 Commencement the few graduates present absorbed no less than fourteen barrels. Of beer - add a barrel of cider and 18 gallons of wine and they must have had a bad one the next day. Harvard's puritanical but delightfully named President Increase Mather attempted reformation*

*of the excesses ...to prevent disorder and profaneness. It was later written that Alas poor Increase, seeking decrease found no surcease.*

While I am sure that your very own President has no need to worry about disorder and profaneness, today is an opportunity for you to show that you have more wisdom than those fathers of long ago, and be in good shape tomorrow. But you can still celebrate well. You have earned it.

I hope you get great enjoyment from whatever it is that you are about to do: tonight, tomorrow and for the months and years to come. Just always try to make a difference. Never forget that you can.