

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Friday 27 July 2018, 4.00pm

Mr Robert Johanson

Chairman of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank

Thank you Professor McCluskey for that kind introduction, and thank you Chancellor for inviting me to speak today.

As Professor McCluskey said, I have been involved in the business of the University of Melbourne for some time. It was 50 years ago next February when I came down from the country, down from Bendigo where I was born, to enrol at the university and my life would be transformed.

I was the first in my family to go to university, but that was not unusual; so were many of the friends that I made here. We were all beneficiaries of the expansion of the universities that had occurred in the 1960s. And we were also beneficiaries of the aspirations and ambitions of our parents who'd been brought up in the deprivations of the Great Depression but whose awareness of the world had opened up through World War II. I came down to enrol in university when I was 17; when my father was 17, he joined the navy and went to war and he knew he did not want a repeat of that for his children.

I read the other day that the new president of Harvard, in his inaugural address, talked of the transformative power of education and of the doors of opportunity that are opened by it. I'm sure the opportunities I received here did transform my life and opened up a set of possibilities that otherwise I'd have been ignorant of. Universities are, I believe, crucial social institutions which enrich communities and civilize societies.

So having been so benefited by it, I have been happy and privileged to be able to give something back to it, as I hope that many of you will do in the future.

Of course in the late 1960s very few people had gone to university and very few jobs required or expected that kind of qualification. Only about 2% of school students went on to university when I came here. It was a long way from the 36% who now enrol much less the 40% we aspire to. The problem now is not so much general access to universities, but dealing with the disenfranchisement that occurs when groups and sections of society are impeded or precluded from participating.

Hence the important project of this university to get at least 1 person from each secondary school in the state here each year. So likely students are identified and supported not just at the end of year 12, by which time ambitions have been defined and choices made, but much earlier, in years 7 and 8, when possible outcomes are broader. A student cohort comprising people from as wide a set of backgrounds, geographies and social groups as possible, will make for a more robust, resilient, challenging and productive student experience and university.

The need to ensure and promote access to university education to young people from all parts of the country, from all social and economic groups and from all the regions is a particular interest of mine. At Bendigo Bank where I'm chairman, many of our customers

and their communities are in regional areas, where university participation rates are in general very low, disastrously so, with a great waste of potential and to the impoverishment of their communities.

So at Bendigo Bank we have for the past 10 years run a scholarship program to help regional students get to university. For regional students, going to university means they usually have to leave home with all the extra expense on households that are often already struggling. We give \$5000 per annum support for living expenses for 2 years. It's not much but for many it has been enough to be the difference, to get them to take up places rather than stay at home or go to work. In 2018 we and our partners in this project supported 233 students across Australia. It's one of the biggest scholarship programs available. 12 of them are here at Melbourne University. Maybe there's one of you here tonight.

The university is today a very different place to the one I came to 50 years ago. It's much bigger and more diverse. The economics of university funding now rely on fees from overseas students. About a third of students come from overseas and they contribute about a half of the fee revenue.

But inevitably, given the financial requirements of those fees, those students from overseas will on the whole come from the affluent parts of their societies. We see a mix of social and economic backgrounds as highly desirable for domestic students but we don't look for the same mix in our overseas students.

Now graduating with you tonight is a young man from a very different background. Mahinder was brought up in a slum in Delhi. He slept on the floor until he was 12. The hut his family lived in was smaller than the room he lived in at Trinity College. He survived childhood and went to school and eventually university because of the work and interventions of Asha, an organisation that now helps 700,000 people in over 50 separate slum areas in Delhi. Asha was founded 30 years ago by Dr Kiran Martin. She stills runs Asha and she is here with us tonight. Asha means hope in Hindi, and she and her team work to empower women, improve and manage health, get children to school, get them work experiences, provide some secure title to the places these people live and shelter. It is an extraordinary organisation which we are privileged to be able to help in some way. Mahinder is, as far as we know, the first person ever from these slums in Delhi, to graduate from an overseas university. This afternoon he will be getting a Master's degree in Computer Science. His journey has been truly an incredible one.

I know that this graduation ceremony tonight is being watched by groups of people in Delhi, by his family to whom we pay our respects, and most importantly by large numbers of young people of the Asha communities, young people who live in those slums, many going to school and university. We hope that all of you are encouraged and inspired by what you see today and by what Mahinder has achieved.

Mahinder is here tonight because of the generosity of the university in providing support for his fees, of Trinity College in supporting his accommodation and of a number of others who have helped. We are all very fortunate to have been able to help and he has contributed hugely to the life of the university, the College and everyone who has dealt with him.

But Mahinder should not be a one off event. We should be encouraging and supporting students from a mix of backgrounds and means from all over Asia to come and study here, to ensure that they too have access to the transformative power of an education at the University of Melbourne.

If Australia is really going to engage with this region, really be part of the Asian Century, if we are going to take up the challenge that the Varghese Report into economic opportunities with India presents, and if we are going to contribute to the economic prosperity and the social development of all parts of these societies, we need a lot more Mahinders.

Thank you.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

This afternoon we are honoured to welcome as guest speaker the chairman of Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, and former Deputy Chancellor of the University, Mr Robert Johanson. Mr Johanson is a graduate of the University of Melbourne, where he studied arts and law, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Laws and Master of Laws. He also holds an MBA from Harvard University. During 12 years' service as a member of the Council and Deputy Chancellor of the University, he was involved in helping establish the Australia India Institute, of which he remains Chairman. He is also chairman of the Australian Friends of Asha Slums, and a director of the Melbourne Business School, Grant Samuel Group and the biopharmaceutical company Neclone Limited. It is a pleasure to call on him to address today's conferring ceremony. Please welcome Mr Robert Johanson.