

# The Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum:

## The Future of Work?

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Governor of New South Wales and  
Vice-Regal Patron of the Royal Society of New South Wales

### Abstract

This is the opening address given by His Excellency the Governor, Patron of the Society, to the Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum on the Future of Work. The Forum was held at Government House in Sydney on Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

I would like to pay my respects to the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

I affirm my respect for their elders, ancestors and descendants – and all Aboriginal people. I recognise their living culture and their knowledge, as the world's oldest continuing culture, which has sustained this land for tens of thousands of years.

As Patron of The Royal Society of New South Wales, I am delighted to welcome all delegates and attendees to this *Royal Society and Four Academies Forum: The Future of Work*.

This Forum, which will take the form of a series of seminars, followed by a panel discussion, will consider the work environment over the next 20-30 years and identify challenges and opportunities in the present, and in the next wave of technological, social and economic change.

I thank you for your eminent contributions to this Forum, being jointly held by The Royal Society and the New South Wales Chapters of Australia's four learned Academies – the Australian Academy of Science, the Australian Academy of Humanities, the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

I think I can safely say this is perhaps the most significant gathering of eminent and esteemed thinkers Government House has seen in my time as Governor – and considering the large number of significant events held here, this is, rightly, high praise, indeed.

Today's Forum goes to the heart of the origins of The Royal Society.

What has defined The Royal Society of New South Wales is its intellectual rigour in

examining the ‘big issues’ in accordance with the motto: ‘*Omnia quaerite*’ or ‘*Question everything*’. This expresses the intent to challenge received opinion, the domination of authority and seek out truth and verification.

This is what we are asking everyone to do today at this Forum: examine *The Future of Work* to identify challenges and opportunities in an environment of rapidly increasing technological, social and economic change.

Our nation, like many economies around the world, is moving out of a traditional manufacturing-based economy to a digital and technology-driven economy.

For example, while we in Australia have seen a decline in our car manufacturing, Google has patented a driverless car. These vehicles combine artificial intelligence with the tools of *Google Street View* maps, video cameras and a range of sensors. And it isn’t letting cows or cyclists stand in their way, patenting a system for driverless cars to avoid immovable objects and recognise cyclists’ hand signals.

This challenge of what the *Future of Work* looks like is a big issue and a pressing issue for our society. It is a topic that has been much discussed in the media, at conferences and by both sides of Government.

Employment – or, more to the point, unemployment, if we don’t get this right – has a wider impact on our society in terms of our social cohesion.

It raises questions in my mind, and I am sure in the minds of everyone here:

*Are we doing enough to prepare our young citizens and our future citizens for the future workplace?*

*Are our education and training – both school and post-school or tertiary – geared to the massive changes in technology of the next decade and beyond?*

*What more can we be doing?*

I hope through confronting some of these big issues of our time, at this Forum and others like it, that we can provide input into policy debates, and create a long term platform for discussion of significant issues at Government House.

The themes to be explored today as part of our *Future of Work* Forum include:

- The digital divide,
- Emerging information technology and while-collar job replacement,
- The impact of technology on human creativity,
- The stratification of society and the emergence of new social classes,
- The rate of social and cultural change,
- The implications of big data,
- Teaching for the future.

When I was appointed Governor of New South Wales 11 months ago, I undertook to foster and promote the people of New South Wales, particularly in the areas of Youth Engagement, Regional and Rural Growth; Innovation, Industry, Trade and Investment; Indigenous Leadership and Inclusiveness and Diversity.

In the past year, I have met with many individuals, organisations and community groups around this State who are engaged in these issues surrounding unemployment and the future of employment for the people of New South Wales.

In the past few months, I have also engaged with many Universities on this issue of

educating our young people for the future workforce.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers report released in April this year, *Future-Proofing Australia's Workforce*, estimated that as many as 75% of jobs of the near future will require Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (what they call the STEM subjects), yet it appears these are the areas of declining study of school and at university.

I am delighted to host this Forum at Government House – I hope the first of many.

I thank you for your enthusiastic consideration of these issues. This is a topic about which I know we are all passionate.

We can look forward to engaging and dynamic presentations, vigorous debate and

challenging discussion; and, perhaps, unexpected, positive and productive outcomes.

In the spirit of the Royal Society:

*'Omnia quaerite'.*

I have touched upon just some starting points to think about in the course of this Forum.

I congratulate you all for starting the conversation.

Let's make sure that it is continued.

I declare this inaugural *Royal Society of New South Wales and Four Academies Forum: The Future of Work* at Government House open.

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