

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
**A RECEPTION TO LAUNCH GROUP TRAINING AUSTRALIA'S "TODAY'S SKILLS:
TOMORROW'S LEADERS" PROGRAM**
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA
9 AUGUST 2006

- Mr Charles Dalglish, Chairman, Group Training Australia
- Mr James Barron, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Stuart Henry, Federal Member for Hasluck, Western Australia
- Mr Barry Wakelin, Federal Member for Grey, South Australia
- Apprentices and Trainees
- Ladies and gentlemen

Marlena and I are delighted to welcome you all here to Government House this morning to launch the *Today's Skills: Tomorrow's Leaders* program for 2007.

It is one of the great satisfactions of my job to see how a valuable program such as this has flourished since its inauguration three years ago.

Bringing together 22 high achieving apprentices and trainees for top level professional development concentrating on leadership and self-management is just the sort of motivation this vitally important technical training sector of our economy needs.

Asked whether the course had been a benefit, a previous participant said, "*I am walking away with so much confidence in my future*".

I hope all of you, selected as you were from a very competitive field for this year's course, will share that sentiment at the end of your five days here in Canberra and that you will spread the word to others so that they too will have the opportunity to feel confident - and proud - of their chosen careers.

Your group's range of participant specialisations is impressive and this year includes:

- building and architectural design;
- engineering;
- refrigeration and air conditioning;
- cookery;
- carpentry;
- landscaping; and
- financial services.

Some of you are electricians. We have an AFL development officer, and a heavy vehicle mechanic.

Interestingly you will be spending time at the Australian Institute of Sport where our elite athletes are trained.

Group Training literature speaks of the passion, commitment and goal setting and achievement you will examine in your sessions with AIS athletes.

The leadership aspects of your training can only be enhanced by this AIS feature of your program.

A few words on the general situation regarding apprenticeships in this country. Whilst we now have more than 1.7 million students or some 13 per cent of the working age population in vocational education and training each year, the skills shortage remains one of our nation's greatest challenges.

Studies show that no less than three out of four Australian companies nominated an inability to secure skilled staff as their main barrier to success over the next three years, whilst 85 per cent of companies nominated the building of their skills base as critical to their competitiveness.

Retention rates are a problem too, with up to a third of skilled people no longer working in the trades for which they are qualified, whilst apprentice levels have fallen below the number of trained people leaving the industry.

The consequences of losing too many trained people are severe not least because in losing trained staff industry also loses invaluable mentors for its apprentices and trainees. These are the people who value their craft. They can pass on to succeeding generations the wisdom and skill that is not learned from a book. They nurture pride in a job well done.

So the challenge is well and truly before us all.

And we have no time to waste. Increasingly we are competing with dynamic and innovative neighbours. China and India for example are already great centres of growth and likely to be the most dynamic economies in the world in the reasonably near future. To prosper we have to stay ahead of them in the excellence of our technical innovation and training.

I also agree with the view of Group Training Chief Executive Officer James Barron, that our schools have an important role in spreading the good word on apprenticeships, particularly in showing school leavers that there are attractive and rewarding careers in these sectors of industry and manufacturing, including in the traditional trades. Being a good plumber or vehicle mechanic is just as important and just as useful to the community as being anything else. So let us emphasise that it's cool to do a trade. Another good medium for publicity I suggest is becoming involved in the several rural area CROC FESTS run throughout Australia each year.

And let's get the success stories back to the schools.

This is why I like the idea of participants becoming role models and following up the Canberra program with visits and presentations to their former schools, and others too. As role models you can expose the next group of high school students to the opportunities available to them and prove that our apprentices and trainees are valued as innovative and productive citizens.

This is but one element of the strategy required to meet our skills shortage. Others might include how we can better anticipate our skilled training needs by bringing governments, industry and academics together on a regular basis to assess national needs several years ahead.

Whilst we have organisations like Group Training Australia prepared to face the issue pro-actively and with vision, and apprentices and trainees of the calibre of those taking part in the 2006 development course, we have every reason to be optimistic.

I understand there are now more than 180 Group Training Organisations employing some 40,000 apprentices and trainees and used by some 35,000 businesses. Such commitment to skills development is invaluable and I commend Group Training Australia accordingly.

As Patron of Group Training Australia, it is now my great pleasure to declare the Training Program *Today's Skills - Tomorrow's Leaders 2006* officially launched.