

ADDRESS BY
HIS EXCELLENCY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL JEFFERY AC CVO MC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
LAUNCH GROUP TRAINING AUSTRALIA'S "TODAY'S SKILLS: TOMORROW'S LEADERS"
PROGRAM
GOVERNMENT HOUSE
7 AUGUST 2007

- . Iain McDougall, Chairman, Group Training Australia
- . Mr James Barron, Chief Executive Officer
- . Apprentices and Trainees
- . Ladies and gentlemen

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

Today's apprentices and trainees follow in the footsteps of ancient forebears. Since the earliest civilisations of Egypt, Greece and Rome, people have been learning and transferring practical skills between one another. But it hasn't always been the easiest of journeys.

Historians have noted that "from the Middle Ages through to the 19th century, apprentices were bound body and soul to their masters. They lived in a master's house, depended upon a master for meagre handouts of food, a little clothing, or a few uncertain shillings." In many instances apprenticeships were considered little more than indentured slavery.

By contrast, in 21st century Australia, vocational education and training underpins much of our national economic development. And although we can learn lessons from the past, we cannot look backwards. To succeed we need to match skills with ideas, good research and creativity.

That's the setting we want; however, it is the people working at the coalface who ultimately define how successful we are. And perhaps as much as any other section of the community, people in trades and services know that actions, not words, are the true measure of a person. They understand the material universe and the way things work. As Benjamin Franklin wisely noted: "well done is better than well said."

Bringing together 21 high achieving apprentices and trainees for first-order professional leadership development is just the sort of motivation this vitally important technical training sector of Australia's economy needs.

The range of specializations in this year's leadership group is impressive:

- electro-technology;
- aeroskills and mechanical engineering;
- civil construction;
- cookery;
- electrical automotives and automotive servicing;
- cabinet making and upholstery;
- plumbing and gas fitting;
- local government planning; and
- fitness, sport and recreation training.

Indeed this cross section of trades and services represents many of the fundamentals that enable us all to live well, communicate, travel and lead healthy lives.

But we know that many more apprentices and trainees are needed. So how do we best capture young minds and hearts - to encourage them to take up trades and services that are exciting and diverse and are an essential force for good in the community?

Do we need better longer-term assessment of national apprenticeship requirements, and a sustained PR strategy emphasising the importance of technical vocations to Australia?

Another part of the answer lies in looking to the apprentices and trainees here. We want you moving through the ranks, valuing and utilising time honoured and proven practical skills, but we also look to you to devise new solutions to old problems, to add value to your knowledge - and in turn to pass on what you know and have experienced.

For example what insights do you have about society's need to live in a sustainable way - be it in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving energy and water, designing cost and resource efficient equipment and processes?

A few words on the general situation regarding apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia. According to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, for the twelve month period ending 31 December 2006:

• commencements in apprenticeships and traineeships increased by 2 per cent to more than 266,000;

• completions of training increased by 5 per cent to more than 142,000; but

• cancellations and withdrawals from training increased by 2 per cent to almost 129,000 students.

The modest increase in apprentices and trainees studying is welcome, although I think the accepted view is that much more needs to be done to lift the numbers. What is also of concern is the increase in cancellations and withdrawals. Are students being attracted into other sections of the labour market by irresistible rewards part way through their training? Could it be that they are making ill-considered choices about career interests and development? Is there room for more informed career briefings and more counselling and mediation services for apprentices and trainees in their start-up phase?

The consequences of losing trained or partially trained people are serious, not least because in losing trained staff, Australia's economy suffers and industry loses valuable, experienced mentors for its apprentices and trainees. And what of the largely untapped potential in our remote indigenous communities where plumbers, electricians, carpenters and vehicle mechanics are in very short supply.

I know that rather than lamenting these and other challenges, Group Training Australia continues to develop its vision for young people and for Australia's technical sustainability. Already the organization is supporting 150 group training organizations across the nation, linking 40,000 apprentices and trainees with 30,000 businesses and industry operators.

Mr Chairman, I strongly support Group Training Australia's leadership program "Today's Skills: Tomorrow's Leaders" because the participants are role models. They have the capacity to influence the next group of high school students and older potential apprentices and trainees - communicating at their level about the opportunities and rewards. And demonstrating that apprentices and trainees are valued as innovative, productive citizens.

They have superb skills, they continue to explore opportunities to develop themselves intellectually and emotionally, and are prepared to give something back to their communities.

So I congratulate the participants in this leadership program. I am certain your time in Canberra will be a memorable experience for each of you. Learn from one another, accept the leadership roles for which you are being well equipped, and continue giving the very best you can for the benefit of our country,

and have fun doing it.

It is now my great pleasure to declare the Training Program Today's Skills - Tomorrow's Leaders officially launched.

Thank you.