



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP

**OPENING THE ADVANCED MANUFACTURING TECHNOLOGIES CENTRE
EAST PERTH COLLEGE OF TAFE
PERTH WA**

I am very pleased to be here this morning to open the Advanced Manufacturing Technologies Centre.

The objective of this Centre is to provide Western Australia with a world class vocational education and training centre - one which will respond to the needs of industry and which will facilitate this State's value added export oriented industries.

This is an ambitious objective.

It is particularly ambitious because vocational education is still, to some extent, the "Cinderella" of the educational system, lacking the resources and prestige of the universities, and often acting as an add-on to a generalist school-level education.

The roots of this neglect are deep, and go back to the nineteenth century. As one eminent person said then, universities were institutions designed "to instruct the youth of the colony in the *higher* branches of education" whereas technical education existed "to instruct the working classes in their particular business".

This dismissal of vocational education, which sadly persists in some quarters, has cost Australia dearly.

It has caused vocational education to become a second-best option for both students and governments.

Over the last 40 years - one working lifetime - the number of students at university has increased more than eighteen fold while the number of students in vocational education has risen by well under a third of that figure.

As a result, the Australian vocational preparation system in the early 1980s was the second smallest in the OECD - we had only one 16 or 17 year old in five in a program, compared with seven in ten in some countries, and an OECD average of one in two.

Not a great performance, you will agree.

And it is not as if students have been going to university instead. Less than one third of students actually go directly to university.

The sad and alarming fact is that almost a quarter of students are seeking to go directly into work without having undertaken any vocational study.

It is these students who are most at risk of long-term unemployment and who, when they get work, will be trapped in low skilled jobs.

Jobs which will inevitably disappear with the inexorable advance of technology.

I think that no-one would disagree that we have an obligation through our education system to prepare young Australians for life and for the future.

We must create an education system that serves individual needs, and by doing so, serves the interests of Australia.

In the new world that our children are now inheriting, the nation's wealth will depend more and more on the skills of our workforce.

That is precisely why the Commonwealth Government, in partnership with State and Territory Governments, is committed to expanding TAFE and enhancing its prestige.

It is why, in July 1992, we reached an historic agreement to establish a new national vocational education and training system.

And a new Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).

ANTA, which is due to come into operation on 1 January next year, will oversee the growth and reform of the vocational training sector, and ensure that its programs better meet the needs and priorities of industry. We will add to our current outlays \$720 million in growth funds for this purpose.

In this sense, it is a first for Australia. It will bring together government, industry and training providers to form a national vocational educational training system with agreed objectives and priorities, assured funding arrangements, and consistent national strategies.

ANTA will work towards closer interaction between industry and vocational education and training providers, and will also improve the links between schools, higher education and vocational education and training.

This is long overdue.

The same can be said for centres such as these.

Manufacturing is one of the main wealth creating sectors in developed, economically vibrant economies.

It is also one of the fastest growing segments of world trade, with significant growth in high value-added goods.

Australia has taken the opportunity to increase its share of this international market.

There is no doubt that we have made dramatic advances in recent years.

Achievements which surprise many Australians when they become aware of them.

In the last three years the volume of manufactured exports has grown by nearly two-thirds.

Exports of elaborately transformed manufactures have risen by 217 per cent over the last decade.

And between 1983 and 1991 research and development personnel in Australian industry experienced the second fastest growth among industrialised countries.

But there is little scope to rest on our laurels.

We need to proceed apace with the improvement of the overall competitiveness of our manufacturing sector - and we can do so by the development and use of advanced manufacturing technologies, or AMT.

Centres such as this one will facilitate the increased adoption of AMT by ensuring a supply of well trained manufacturing technologists who have a broad range of appropriate skills rather than narrow trade-based training.

They can be at the cutting edge of Australia's international export strategy. And they need to be - for the Science and Engineering Council found last year that the level of adoption of AMT by Australian manufacturing industry is uneven and generally lagging behind that in competitor nations.

This Centre will make a valuable contribution to assisting Western Australian industry to take up and use advanced manufacturing technology, and thereby enhance the competitiveness of Australian manufacturing in general.

It will also raise the profile of vocational education, and prove that TAFE is meeting the challenges of the 1990s.

And there is no doubt that TAFE is doing so.

The results of the survey of TAFE students released earlier this week, which shows that 87 per cent of students were satisfied with their courses, indicates that TAFE is doing a good job.

But we need to improve it further, and let people know how good it really is.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to open the Australian Manufacturing Technologies Centre. I congratulate all concerned with the building of the Centre and wish students and staff all the best for the future.

PERTH

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