



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
LAUNCH OF THE YOUTH TRAINING INITIATIVE PROGRAM,
PARRAMATTA TOWN HALL, PARRAMATTA, 2 DECEMBER 1994**

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Thank you very much for that introduction, Eden. Caroline and Ian, my ministerial colleagues Simon Crean and Ross Free, and Paul Elliott, the Member for Parramatta and his wife Julie, the Sarah Redfern High School and young Australians. It is a very great pleasure for me to be involved today with my colleagues in this initiative which came from Working Nation. Because, I think the thing you have to know is that 11 years ago - when those of you who are now completing High School were 7 years of age, or those of you who are in Year 11 were 6 - some of us were thinking about a new Australia. We were imagining a country completely different than the one we had at the time. Because you know enough about our history to know why we inherit this vast continent, and have it as one to ourselves, we were part of the old industrial culture of the West European/North American world under what used to be called Imperial preference. And we built up an industrial base in this country which became antiquated and out of touch and unproductive, and when the countries we traded with went into trade blocs - like Britain went into the European Community - Australia was left with this ring fence of tariffs, and inside it a great heap of industrial archaeology. Before that, of course, as the clip said, there were jobs aplenty. But, they were unskilled jobs for low-value products. But, the history of the post-War world - with the rise of the great states like Japan and Germany, and the continuing growth of the big industrial economies like the United States - has put the wealth into value added and into production which had with it innovation, and we in this country have had to now try and re-adapt Australia in a relatively short period of time.

Now, that meant two things: how to employ our people - what do they do, and what sort of jobs will they have? And - particularly our young people - how can we encourage them to be part of a society which produces good and

innovative things, a clever country that has an international future? One thing we all did know, was that we could never hope to be a clever country when those of you in Years 11 and 12 were 6 and 7 years of age, we knew that only 3 out of every 10 of you completed secondary school because that is as it was. And that the rest that went back out were largely untrained - 7 out of 10 untrained. Now, how can you develop a smart society with that? And how could you look a young person in the eye and say, "We have a place for you"?

So, we had to do 2 things - remodel the Australian economy quickly, rebalance it and take away all the ring fences, open Australia up to the world, and at the same time, start to bring up the education of our young people. Now, it is one of the great matters of pride to me, that in this year that same cohort of young people - it is not 3 in 10 completing secondary school, it is 8 in 10. 8 in 10. And 40% of that output is going through universities, and all of those thousands of places have been added to the system since 1985. Indeed, about 16 universities of the size of Sydney University have been added to the system by this Government since 1985. But, because that is 40%, you don't have to be a mathematician to work out the great majority of young people were coming out of the system and not going to university, and many untrained. Indeed, the majority untrained.

So, what we have focussed on in the last few years is developing vocational education, or as you would call it, TAFE. So that we have a national TAFE system, and a national system of accreditation and a training certificate which will give you mobility in this country, and the capacity to pick up a job. Now, Simon Crean, Ross Free and I have been working now for a number of years with some of our colleagues to build up that TAFE system. Because we have got the universities well and truly up and running, the challenge now is to build that TAFE system up, and to have it there so that as you leave school in Year 12, you go in to that training and this period is the period we focus on - 15 to 19 - as a period of vocational preparation. In other words, the school to work transition. So, this is what the Youth Training Initiative is about.

We had 2 things about young people in Working Nation: one was the Australian Youth Traineeship Foundation, which is about encouraging young people to start streaming themselves into vocational education in Years 11 and 12, while at school. That is, to start taking on work experience and away from school training, and picking up units for accreditation in TAFE while at school. And Simon, Ross and I launched that in Gosford about 3 months ago. Today, we are launching the second part of it, and that is the Youth Training Initiative. And, the reason we are doing that is that about 14% of students are dropping out of both school and further study. In other words, they are not going to TAFE even if it is there, they are not going on to a tertiary education - they are simply dropping out. Now, we have a view, and that is that we are optimistic about this country. You saw this week we are growing now at about 6% GDP growth, we have got inflation at under 2%, we have had 400,000 job growth since the election. Now, this is a workforce of 8 million - 400,000 jobs since the last election is a phenomenal rate of

employment growth. But we want to stream young people into that flow of jobs, and we believe that there is great cause for optimism about Australia - we have never been more competitive, we have never been more innovative, our education system is up and really driving product innovation, we are now exporting to the Asia-Pacific as we have never done before - we are actually sitting beside the fastest growing markets in the world for the first time in Australian history, and you might know that with APEC - Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation in a very historic declaration I was involved with in Indonesia 2 weeks ago that we have agreed all of us the countries of the Asia-Pacific, to develop a free trade area. Now that means that Australia will be part of a large market that it has never been part of before, and the exciting possibilities are there for young people to look at some of these countries, and some of these great cities like Shanghai in China where you see this enormous activity, or in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, or Jakarta in Indonesia - these are all the possibilities. You could be working for an Australian company and very easily find yourself there, then find yourself back in Australia, then find yourself in North America - the range of possibilities for you now is endless and entirely invigorating.

So, with that sort of prospect and this sort of growth, we want all of you, that's every one of you, to take the opportunities of a tertiary education, a vocational education, and we don't want you slipping through the cracks of the system into unemployment where your self esteem drops, where you think the world is not interested in you, and you start turning your back on society. This place is too rich and it has got too much going for it, for that to happen.

So, the Youth Training Initiative is something we've thought up which will start from the first of January next year and it will work in this way: if you're under 18 and you've been unemployed for 13 weeks you'll be eligible for assistance. Now, that assistance comes by way of a case manager. A case manager is a person who individually makes a relationship with you and starts to understand your educational attainments, your personality, what your aptitudes are, what you might do. So, you have that one to one relationship, you don't just go down to a CES office and give your name across the counter looking for a job, or worse, not go at all. We actually have this case management, one to one relationship where the case manager helps you to identify your needs, to search then for suitable education, training and work opportunities and to help you coordinate access to services such as labour market programs.

Now, a labour market program is something where there is a job subsidy and there is structured training. So, this person assesses you, tries to understand what you are capable of, gets you back into structured training or education or into work. In other words, we don't let you fall through the system, somewhere. So, the Youth Training Initiative is one of those links - perhaps one of the last links in this hierarchy of changes - to take young people who are part of that 14 per cent, who run the risk of falling out of the system and believing that nobody wants them and society isn't interested in them. This is our way, the government's way of saying, we are interested, we will pick you

up, we will individually enquire about you, we'll take a personal interest in you and we'll put you back in the system. So, this is what we are launching today. We're launching the Youth Training Initiative. And, it also means if you're assessed as being at high risk, that is, the likelihood of you being at high risk of long term unemployment because of, say, your attitude, your attainment, your family background or something - a combination of factors leads one to assess such a person as being at high risk of long term unemployment - then the case manager will start managing you immediately. In other words, there is no 13 week wait.

So, we think that this is a great social improvement. The whole of Working Nation was about a social improvement. It was about saying that those people who've been out of work for 12 months or more - and that can be people in their middle age, or young people who may be unemployed 18 months or two years - that we say that this is not good enough for Australia. This is not good enough for a country which believes in fairness and equality. And, we will pick you up, case manage you, train you, give you a job subsidy and get you back into work. Now, I told you a few minutes ago that since the election just under two years ago, we've had 400,000 job growth. About 100,000 of those have gone to the long term unemployed. This is the cause of much satisfaction on the part of the government. Because, were we speaking about this 10 years ago and we had 400,000 jobs, maybe 20,000 would have gone to the long term unemployed, or 25,000. Now, we're talking about 100,000 - so a quarter of the jobs are going to the long term unemployed. And, that is because of what we call the labour market programs and those labour market programs are actually focusing these people up.

So, Working Nation was about that. It was about streaming the long term unemployed back into work, it was about saying as we all move on as a country we will move on together, we won't have an underclass where the long term unemployed are the shock absorbers in the system who carry the burden of economic change. But, rather, we bring them along with us and we move them along together. But, whatever we do in this respect, as a government, we are entirely certain we must do that and more, with our young Australians. That is, if we believe that Australia has such, now in the nineties, a low inflation and high growth future producing innovative products and exports and linkages to the rest of the world, we know that, properly trained, the jobs are going to be there for young Australians. Because, our experience in the eighties was the same - in the last ten years we've created nearly two million jobs. Young Australians got more than their share of those, but those who are not trained can't, and won't. And, that's why we want to train them. Now, I don't know that there are any other countries that have programs quite like this, we think this is a pretty revolutionary approach. Because, we are saying, as a matter of national policy, we won't let one young person slip through the system if it is avoidable, and that we will go and case manage them and strike up a personal relationship with them, and get them back into structured education or training, or into work experience.

So, you look at that panoply of things: tertiary education, the massive participation rates now in schools, the growth in tertiary education, the building of vocational education, the Australian Traineeship Foundation, for students in years 11 and 12 to start streaming their way into work experience while at school, setting up their career path while at school. And, then, those who are untrained, the 14 per cent, the ones who drop right out of education and training - this initiative is about getting them back in. So, you run right across the spectrum, from those with the highest TERs going on into tertiary, to those who have fallen out of the system, we say the system should have everybody.

So, that's what it is about, that is what we've been seeking to do. And, I am delighted to find so many people in education, so many young people responding to these programs - and doing so with a confidence, that I believe young Australians must have. One of the key things I would like to see this government achieve, indeed the country achieve, is that the optimism we have is passed on to every young Australian - that they feel good about Australia, they feel good about themselves, they feel good about the nation's identity and its sense of self confidence, and they believe that there is a place in there for them. This is what this is about. So it is with very great pleasure indeed, that today, I launch this Youth Training Initiative on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, and believe that every young Australian, as a consequence, can have the hope that if the system doesn't work quite right for them, in double jig time, we'll have them back on the track and back in this society that cares for them, that nurtures them and that loves them. That's the sort of country we want.

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