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Speech by Adam Graycar, Chief Executive Officer, Office of Tertiary Education, Adelaide at a Principal's Conference held at Kapunda High School, 13 December 1993

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Adam Graycar

to Apunda
High
School

Principals Conference

13/12/93

Don't photo

In these difficult economic times I'm reminded about the story of the economics graduate Tom who, 20 years after he'd graduated dropped by to visit his old professor. The professor had just finished marking the third year exams and showed Tom the exam paper and said "How do you reckon you'd go at that?"

Tom scanned the paper and said "You know, these questions look familiar - I'm sure they're the same questions you were asking 20 years ago."

"Yep, they are", said the professor.

"Well don't the students get previous papers and churn out the same old answers."

"Won't help", said the professor, "in economics the questions stay the same year after year - but we keep changing the answers!"

That's the problem with the world
- the same impossible questions
face us over & over again -
- how to do the right thing
- how to do things right
- how to make things work
- how to spread a perpetual
insufficiency of money (who has
enough)
across all our needs.

mother - value at butcher - piece
of beef with no fat & no bone.
"Madam" he said slowly "we've been
in this for years like that for years
to give you know they like just call over"

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I am pleased to be here with you today - a day on which you celebrate your achievements - achievements that have come at the end of a sustained effort, and effort that has meant that you have had to work hard, forgo certain pleasures to meet all sorts of deadlines, and probably appear a bit unbearable at times, to those near and dear to you.

Now you've successfully negotiated one hurdle, and I am pleased to be here tonight to congratulate you on your success, and encourage you to seek out other hurdles, and approach them calmly and with confidence.

The challenges you'll all face are the challenges of change. The world today is nothing like it was when I was your age

we've seen
Revolutions in communications, transport, (it takes less and less time to fly across the world, but more and more time to drive across our big cities), technology etc. *far quicker*
Comparison with when I was at school

When I left high school we had the sorts of problems I'm sure you wish you had - the problems of choice . Those that wanted to go straight into the workplace had problems choosing among the many job prospects that were on offer. Getting a job wasn't a problem, but deciding which career path to follow gave food for thought. Those that wanted to go to university had to work out whether they (or their families) could afford it (if they didn't win a scholarship) and then deciding what they wanted to study - in those days everybody who wanted to go to university got in. Nobody thought of going to TAFE!

Today, I don't need to remind you, it's not like that at all. It's tougher, but the **challenge** is to make it better.

We lived in a very narrow closed world back then - cosseted and protected, but we didn't know then that we would not be able to sustain it. Our workplaces were hierarchal and hidebound, and our education system was rigid and dogmatic. The world around us has changed dramatically and while you are all under enormous pressure - much greater than any of the pressures that my generation had to face - you have a more challenging world ahead, and are being better prepared for it than my generation ever was.

Grand Canyon

Governments do some things well, others not so well - some things quickly, others not so quickly.

*2 issues - manage change
- value community
- belong*

We live in a world where the skills and education that you will acquire are the currency of the present and the driving power of the future. We live in unprecedented and changing times. You're part of those changing times - you're part of the revolution that has been changing Australia and the developed, and rapidly developing part of the world in the past two decades.

The most significant change has been the insatiable demand for education and training. Everybody wants lots of it - everybody wants more and more. A decade ago more 16 year olds had left school than were in school. Today we have a 93% retention rate for year 12. This is a monumental achievement, but it has problems too, as we find we have not been able, as a government or a community to provide jobs for a significant proportion of our population. What is notable, however, is

that the more education and training a person has, the less likely that they will be unemployed.

and the
But those of us faced with changes almost as big as the grand canyon, and those of us wanting to put our newly acquired skills to the test have to understand the nature of change, and understand that any skill and training that you might have today will need to be built upon, as ways of doing things change, as technology improves, and as our social world continues to change. Leaving school, leaving TAFE, or leaving uni is not the end of your education - its a pathway to more education and training.

I'm very proud of our young people - A National survey of youth published three weeks ago by the Australian Youth Foundation (AYF) has found that most young people look forward to a positive future, and share the aspirations of their parents and grandparents: they want education and training in order to get good jobs which will help them eventually raise families of their own. But the report also warns that half a million young Australians are surviving on the fringe of society. Alienated, poor, frightened, these are kids who could easily start to lose hope and believe they have been conned by society.

The young people surveyed compiled a litany of complaints against the rest of society. Schools don't prepare them for jobs, they said, and anyhow there is a lack of employment opportunities for first-job seekers. The social security system doesn't help either; financial support is inadequate and the restrictions on the amount of part-time work a person is allowed while receiving social security are a disincentive to gaining work experience and job references. Many young people

worry about the pervasiveness of violence these days - in homes, on the streets - and many feel that they are being blamed through negative stereotyping by the media and a general public antagonism towards the young. Many concede that a lack of motivation on their part has contributed to their predicament. Many others admit to distinctly unendearing behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, racism and irresponsible sexual behaviour.

And significantly, not every institution comes under criticism. The TAFE system in particular rates highly among those interviewed. Young people say that TAFE is relevant to their lives and that they are treated with respect at TAFE colleges. While more and more expectations are placed on school systems to correct social failings, and the educational and vocational roles of the universities become increasingly confused, TAFE colleges provide occupational training that is clearly-focused yet highly responsive to the changing needs of the jobs market.

In recent decades our world has changed. We have all seen technical changes of astounding, stunning and overwhelming consequence. We can find technical solutions to many of our problems. We can think the unthinkable and do the undoable - yet are we a lot better off? We can do magic on our computers, telephones and a fax machines, investigate the mysteries of space, analyse the gases surrounding Jupiter, fire a probe into the nucleus of Halley's Comet, fix the optics on the Hubble telescope as it orbits through space. We have learned brilliantly the means of accomplishing scientific and technical advance. When we look at our present capacity to solve problems it is apparent that we do our best when the problems involve little or no social context. We're

skilled in coping with problems with no human ingredient at all, as in the physical sciences or in the technologies. We can send people to the moon, yet we can't find jobs for our young people; or appropriate accommodation for all our older people. We can keep people alive for twenty to twenty-five years beyond retirement yet we can't ensure that they can live those years in dignity. We can fill our cities with glitzy and expensive office blocks which remain empty, yet we can't provide classroom or library space for our university students; we can grow anything - we can increase the protein yield in our crops and grow more crops per hectare than ever before, yet we can't feed most of the world's 15 million refugees or even prevent our farmers from going broke;

✓ We need to understand our society and our world.

✓ Everything about modern life seems to conspire against a sense of community, and as a result we can lose something that most of us need very much.

We need the stability that comes from a coherent community. We need the assurance of identity that comes from knowing and being known.

✓ We need the experience of a visible social context in which we fit. We need a sense of obligations to others. Perhaps more than anything else, we need a sense of participation.

This will give us a base as our technology and work relations change dramatically.

• 20 years ago, half of what a person learned through training was

likely to be useful for up to 14 years. Today, even core knowledge has to be upgraded after five years. Employers and employees will therefore need to make commitments to life-long learning.

- As industry continues to restructure, there will be a change to the occupational and skills profile of the workforce. We are moving towards a smaller, multi-skilled workforce, able to undertake more complex activities and respond to new and changing conditions.

These shifts within industry and enterprises will create new demands for vocational education and training.

- There is the changing nature of work and employment. People no longer enter work and stay there - will need to make about 6 to 10 careers changes over working life as jobs change/disappear. There will therefore be a need for training over life. - lifelong learning.

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- 80% of those now in junior primary will enter careers that do not exist now and use technology which has not yet been invented.
 - We will need to develop key competencies i.e. have certain key skills, to allow the workforce to be responsible to change.

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- collecting, analysing and organising information
 - planning and organising activities
 - working with others in teams
 - using mathematical ideas and techniques

- solving problems
- using technology
- cultural understanding

These are different things to what my generation was taught at school.

The most important commodity in 21st century Australia will be knowledge, and the most important capability will be that of accessing, creating and using knowledge. Having and using knowledge will determine how well nations adapt, survive and prosper in a global environment characterised by accelerating change and increasing uncertainty - economically, environmentally and socially."

There is knowledge about science, technology, there is knowledge about the world around us, and there is knowledge about communities and people.

The effort to educate all our citizens has certain consequences. It means mass education. It means crowded school and universities. It means devising educational programs for youngsters who will grow up to be plumbers and farmers as well as for those who will grow up to be philosophers and art critics. In short, it is a very different system from one designed to educate young aristocrats for the role of cultivated gentlemen. (Of those starting university this year, 57% were female and 43% were male!) We have set ourselves a task of astonishing dimensions. And having set ourselves these objectives, we can't get upset because our educational system no longer resembles the cosy, tidy world we deliberately put behind us.

Those who don't understand the nature of change in our society cannot credibly offer to play a role in the business, social, or political leadership of the community. In the last decade or two we have moved from a predominantly British society to multiculturalism, from a society dominated by the traditional "nuclear family" to one where that no longer predominates, from a society in which women stayed at home, to one in which their role, especially in the workforce is profoundly different. We live in a society where the arts matter, where the aspirations of young Australians include a place for the environment, for social justice, for personal liberty, as well as for home ownership and job security.

The challenge before us is the challenge of change and people of your generation will be the ones to manage that change. As most of the jobs of the 21st century haven't been invented yet, it won't do for fuddy-duddies like me to manage that change.

My message to you is that in preparing for the uncharted road of the future, realise that you will continually be confronted by change, (much of it threatening, but much of it also very exciting), learn to grow your own plants rather than expect cut flowers, be aware of and part of our multicultural and diverse society, participate in your community, and don't be daunted by technology - then you'll have a positive outlook and a steady path ahead of you.