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PRESS RELEASE

Comments by Liam Connellan, Director General, Confederation of Irish Industry at H.E.A. Conference on "Higher Education : Relevance and Future" at the Burlington Hotel, Dublin on 18 September 1984 at 4 p.m.

NEED TO PLAN FOR INCREASED SUPPLY OF ENGINEERING GRADUATES TO ENSURE SUSTAINED INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION

Manufacturing output is now expanding at a rate similar to the late 1970s and is likely to grow at a faster rate in the coming decade than in the last decade.

The availability and recruitment of qualified technologists is a prerequisite for sustained rapid industrial development. Incentives to encourage greater recruitment of engineering graduates by manufacturing firms have been agreed by the Sectoral Development Committee within the Department of the Taoiseach.

Ireland has, proportionately, only one third the number of engineers and technologists as countries such as Japan, Denmark, France and the United States.

The recruitment of engineering graduates by Irish industry has almost doubled over the last two years and increased by 45% last year to a total of 233. Industry now accounts for almost two thirds of all engineering graduate recruitment.

I recognise that 12% of new engineering graduates were still seeking employment six months after graduating last year. However, this occurred after three consecutive years of recession and stagnation. Educational plans must take a view of the medium term trend. Furthermore, investment in technological skills of this nature is not solely a response to expected demand but provides graduates with the skills which will enable the graduates themselves to create economic growth.

Since it takes four years to educate an engineering graduate, it is necessary to forecast the rate of increase in demand five to ten years ahead. Many factors contribute to an increased demand for engineering graduates in the economy. These include the low proportion of qualified engineers in the adult population; the growing technological nature of our society; the more favourable outlook for industrial growth over the next decade; the continuing restructuring of industry in favour of the manufacture of technology based products; and the introduction of incentives to raise the level of technical manpower resources closer to those of our competitors.

The supply of engineering graduates has increased by about 20% per annum over the last three years. I am concerned that engineering graduate output is forecast to expand by an average of only 10% per annum over the next five years. I would recommend that the intake of first year engineering students should be increased by 20% per annum over the next five years, and that the position be reviewed annually.

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