

speech to celebrate the transfer of the *University of Canberra Act* from the Commonwealth of Australia to the Australian Capital Territory

1 December 1997

Speaker Greg Cornwell, Minister Bill Stefaniak, ladies and gentlemen,

This is an important day for the University and for the ACT, because it marks the moment when the ACT acquires its own University, and by doing so acquires equal status in this respect with all the other States and Territories. Indeed, the passage of time between self-government and the establishment of an ACT University has been commendably fast. It has been second in Australia only to Victoria, which established Melbourne University three years after the colony achieved self-government in 1851. The ACT has had a distinct advantage, of course, in that the Commonwealth has been quietly preparing the University of Canberra for this moment over the previous thirty years!

So the ACT has acquired a University that is in no sense an infant, but a fully-fledged and well-regarded higher education institution with a range of courses and expertise that properly match the Territory's needs for knowledge. That there is such a match is not at all strange, since much of what we do at UC owes its origin, like the Faculty of Education and the School of Nursing, in order to fill a real and apparent need within the ACT. Like the other state universities, the University of Canberra exists because it has a job to do for its local community. Yet within the Australian community of universities UC has a special place, since our name and situation give us a national and international role as well as a powerful local role. Some of you will not be aware that, quite apart from our 700 international students, who come from 70 countries, one in three of our Australian students comes to Canberra from outside the ACT — and from every State and Territory. These students represent an important source of revenue for Canberra, of course, but they also indicate the drawing power of the capital city and of the University of the capital city.

The co-operation between the ACT and its University is a daily relationship, and one that will strengthen in the new century. It cannot be doubted that the 21st century will be the century of knowledge. Anything that governments, corporations or the community may wish to do on any scale will require thought, study and knowledge and the services of people educated to advance knowledge and apply it to contemporary problems. This is the core business of a university like ours. Our task is to educate people to be sensitive to the need for knowledge and the need to apply it well, and we play our part in the advancement of knowledge through the work of our staff and postgraduate students. So we provide a second, alternative research facility for governments, corporations and community organisations, a role that is growing in importance. Not only that, we are also providing an alternative training and education facility. In a world where the needs for re-education and re-training are both pressing and usually changing, the University is able to serve both as a home for the continuing education of civil servants and as a provider of highly focussed education and training programs directly into the workplace. This role too is growing in importance.

Mr Speaker and Minister, you have both been kind in mentioning the efforts of University staff over the five years during which the negotiations necessary to achieve the transfer have been occurring. I should add to those whom you have mentioned Dr John Grant, who retired earlier this year as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Let me in turn pay tribute also to the work of Helen Hill and Wendy Taylor in the Department of Education and Training, to the Chief Minister and you yourselves, and to the members of the previous ACT Government. All of you have seen the transfer as being a good thing for the Territory and a matter that has possessed a completely bi-partisan from the very beginning. The University has found that a most reassuring sign for the future. On behalf of all of us at UC I thank you both for your good words and good wishes. May I propose a toast: to the Territory and its University!