WESTERN Australia’s appetite for eastern-trained technicians is likely to intensify, with the premier forewarning interstate TAFE bosses that many of their graduates would join the western exodus.

“We need a lot of people here,” Colin Barnett told the TAFE Directors Association conference yesterday in Perth.
“There’s probably a need for another 100,000 or more people to come across into WA and take up jobs. Many of them will come from your institutes around Australia.

“(We need) metallurgists, technicians, computer scientists - not just people with a shovel and truck. They’re all areas (in which) you’re training and producing graduates, wherever you are across Australia.”

Mr Barnett said people on the east coast misunderstood WA’s mining and petroleum industries, and that he was offended by descriptions such as “China’s quarry” and a “dig it up, ship it out economy”.

He said WA’s ore deposits were extensive but mostly low-grade, and its mining successes came down to science and technology.

Techniques developed or perfected in WA had fostered the emergence of a “whole new industry sector”, he said.

They included the “carbon in pulp” gold extraction technique, the Bayer process for producing alumina from bauxite, and “pressure acid leach” processes for treating low grade metal ore deposits previously considered uneconomic.

Mr Barnett said 80 per cent of the investment in many mining projects involved high-temperature, high-pressure mineral processing operations. “The level of skill, technology and training that goes into that industry is extraordinary.”

But the state needed more than miners, he said, and there had been a wholesale shift of corporate, financial and legal professionals to Perth in recent years.

He said that with the opening of a new office tower last Month, Perth now housed almost a quarter of mining giant BHP’s 100,000-strong global workforce. “Melbourne, the home of BHP, now has about 300,” he said.

“Many of your graduates, I hope, will come and work in WA as that trend continues.”