Thank you for the introduction.

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people, traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

I extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are here with us today.

I would also like to acknowledge:

- The Hon Peter Hall MLC, Victorian Minister for Higher Education and Skills
- Brian Wexham, CEO, SkillsOne Television
- Richard Turnbull, Acting CEO, Kangan Institute
- Phillip Murphy, General Manager, Kangan Institute
- Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors:
  - Bryan Norrie, Melbourne Storm player, electrician and NRL Apprenticeship Mentor;
It’s great to be here with you for the launch of this year’s National Skills Week, which kicks off in about two weeks’ time.

From 26 August to 1 September, people across the length and breadth of our nation will come together to celebrate this annual event.

It’s impossible to imagine a prosperous Australia without a strong vocational education and training sector delivering many of the skills that industry needs.

A well-skilled workforce is not only good for industry and our economy – it also helps Australians into better-paid jobs, which leads to an improved standard of living and social mobility.

That’s why you constantly hear this Federal Labor Government talking about skills and jobs.

We’ve worked hard to create nearly a million jobs since coming to office even in the face of the Global Financial Crisis when most other advanced economies went backwards.

We’ve also backed up our talk with action.

Over the past six years, we’ve significantly reformed and rebuilt the skills and training sector.

Some of our achievements include:

- A record investment in skills and training of more than $19 billion over the past five years;

- With the States and Territories, we have delivered a national training entitlement under the $1.75 billion Skills Reform National Partnership guaranteeing all Australians access to a training place up to Certificate III level.

- More Vocational Education Training students than ever before: In 2012 there were 1.9 million students in the public system, up from 1.67 million in 2007, an increase of 13.8%;

- Some 1.54 million VET places in 2012 were government funded, an increase of 24.2% from the 1.24 million in 2007;
• A $101 million Australian Apprenticeships Mentoring Package to provide targeted mentoring support to help thousands of Australian apprentices to stay on and complete their apprenticeship;

• Access to an apprenticeship for 70,000 Australians through the Kickstart Initiative;

• A steady stream of apprentices and trainees: 454,700 people undertook apprenticeships and traineeships in December 2012, up from 404,300 in December 2007, a rise of 12.5%;

• Access to a Trade Training Centre for every senior high school student in Australia by 2018; and

• Access to Income Contingent Loans to finance a higher level vocational qualification.

  o This means that all Australians have an entitlement to more than $90,000 worth of training under this initiative.

Although this is a strong record that we’re proud of, we are not resting on our laurels.

In the past three days alone, we have announced an additional $100 million in funding to assist more than 21,000 workers and young job seekers to boost their skills and improve their career prospects.

This new investment consists of three important initiatives, including:

• Our Step into Skills program which provides $35 million to deliver core employability skills to about 9,000 disadvantaged young people aged between 16 and 24 years-old;

• Our Manufacturing Skills Plus measure - an additional $35.6 million to assist around 6,800 new and existing manufacturing workers in upskilling for hi-tech manufacturing to help manage an economy in transition; and

• The Skilling for Better Services initiative announced today which provides $30.6 million to support more than 5,800 new and existing workers to be upskilled in the health and community services sectors like disability services, aged care and childhood education.

We’ve made this vital investment because we know the Australian workplace is changing and we are committed to making sure people have the right skills to be productive and efficient contributors in a modern economy.
In the twenty-first century economy of Australia, skills and jobs go hand-in-hand and skills training is one thing nobody can afford to take for granted.

This is true whether you are a job seeker at the start of your working life or you’ve been in the workforce for decades.

National Skills Week plays a vital role in highlighting this fact to our community.

It creates awareness about the importance of VET in delivering the skilled workers needed in meeting Australia’s growing numbers of higher skill jobs.

This year there'll be hundreds of activities at many places—from Broadmeadows Shopping Centre here in Melbourne to Tenant Creek in the Northern Territory.

I urge everyone in our community who is interested to get involved.

I’m told cookery apprentices and students from this institute will be among the many young Australians getting ready to be part of the action, which ranges from cooking competitions to skills and jobs expos.

Thank you for welcoming us to your beautiful campus and congratulations on your commitment to high-quality training to help meet Victoria’s skills needs.

My thanks also go to our Australian Apprenticeship Ambassadors and our Skillaroo Gold Medallist, Timothy Taylor.

These skills ‘graduates’ freely give their time to promote the benefits of VET.

I also thank Brian Wexham and others from SkillsOne. I’m confident your leadership will ensure this year’s event builds on the success of previous ones.

It is now my great pleasure to declare the National Skills Week 2013 launched.

ENDS

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