I acknowledge the Wurrrundgeri people of the Kulin nations, the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered today. We pay our respects to them for their care of the land.

Welcome to this 2016 careers practitioners seminar and to our beautiful Burwood campus... with almost 28,000 students – this is the largest of Deakin’s campuses.

A quick update on Deakin. Deakin’s growing research reputation is reflected in our rise up the international rankings. Just before Christmas Deakin was ranked 36 globally and 7 nationally in the QS international ranking of the world’s young universities (those under 50 year). If you include the Oxfords and Harvards our QS ranking is 324 and Times Higher Education World rankings we are 318. Deakin now ranks in the top 3% of the world’s universities in each of the three major rankings including the prestigious Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Ranking of the world’s universities.

In the Excellence in Research for Australia 2015 round announced late last year, 90 % of Deakin research was rated at or above world standard.

And in teaching, Deakin continues to apply innovation to the digital world with flair. At the international US Education awards (the Oscars of innovation in higher education) Deakin was awarded the Gold Global prize for its ICT support and services. Of course what matters most is what our students think of us, and I was delighted that for the sixth successive year Deakin was first in Victoria for student satisfaction.

I am also delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you this morning and to reflect on this important seminar theme of transition, and what it means both for individuals and for the higher education sector.

As individuals, we all go through many transitions in our lives – some are anticipated with great excitement and others accompanied by more than a twinge of anxiety. Even when the transition is something we’ve been anticipating with great excitement – a university place in the course of our dreams for example – transitions are accompanied by awkward emotional spaces that can last weeks or even months. Times where we feel cut off from what is familiar to us and have not yet settled comfortably into a new environment. There are unfamiliar surroundings and unfamiliar faces ... there are new friends to make, new rules to follow and new expectations to work out. Of course it’s exciting but it can also be daunting.

We aim to make Deakin a place where students feel at home as soon as possible: where they feel they belong and have the confidence to thrive. We know that students expect from their university what they expect from every aspect of their lives – easy access to the information they need, when they need it and in a format and style that makes sense to them.

Our students enrol using DeakinSync – a personal online hub which provides instant access to information on units and study resources, accommodation and transport. From DeakinSync students can access the library, create, store and share documents, videoconference with friends or
lecturers, check their timetable, or book a computer – anywhere, anytime, from any device and with no hassle. We know that few university students today are either solely ‘on-campus’ or solely ‘off-campus’. DeakinSync is integral to life at Deakin for students at all Deakin’s campuses.

Of course Deakin staff are always there to help with advice and support, but so too is DeakinSync and our cognitive computer IBM Watson. Watson can provide seemingly prescient responses to students’ questions 24/7 and for 365 days a year.

University success encompasses so much more than a degree. The skills students learn outside the classroom, the friends they make, the part-time jobs they do to earn money and the networks they develop all have tangible benefits that go far beyond dollars.

The connections you make, with peers and with your university, continue to be one of the most powerful success indicators. Deakin orientation programs encourage students to join a club, keep up with their sport and to explore volunteering and internship opportunities.

The Orientation program’s social and academic activities introduce students to life and study at Deakin – to get to know more about their course, to meet faculty staff and to make friends.

But universities too are undergoing a transition of sorts. In the age of Google, in this age of savage disruption, the internet is now the primary platform for information exchange and universities are no longer the sole gatekeepers of knowledge. We are experiencing a wave of innovation that has given us the ubiquity of mobile technology, big data, robotics and social media. We have 3D computing and the internet of things – our cars, our clothes, our buildings are embedded with electronics, software, sensors and network activity.

Those interested in history know that the world’s economies have always been shaped by revolutionary inventions – the printing press, the telephone, the steam engine, the silicon chip. Each successive wave of change was accompanied by the drastic and sudden elimination of jobs and the demand for new and different skills. Millions left agriculture but many more went into manufacturing.

And each successive wave of change ushers in new ways of doing things. In the fifteenth century, the Oxford dons were worried the invention of the printing press and the access it provided to the printed word would make them redundant. It’s a matter of history that the invention of the printing press prompted a transition to a new way of teaching that was to become the forebear of the classroom techniques that have been familiar in our schools and universities for decades.

Universities today are again in a period of transition, and just as it is for in individuals, the transition is anticipated with great excitement by some and with rather more than a twinge of anxiety by others.

And as is true for all transitional periods, we are currently occupying that awkward emotional space where so much of what we are experiencing is unknown, uncertain, ambiguous and unpredictable. American Senator Robert Kennedy said in a famous 1966 speech: “interesting times are times of challenge and uncertainty, but it is in interesting times that we are more open to creative energy and to opportunity than at any other time in our history”.

Well … periods of transition are always interesting times. And it’s similarly true for our higher education sector. For those prepared to embrace and leverage the global megatrends of big data automation and customisation – these are very exciting times.
With the advent of MOOCs, disruptive change has given us the potential to democratise education free from the tyranny of the ATAR, free from fixed concepts of meritocratic selection and free from pre-conceived notions of who should go to university and when.

The opportunities of digital change have already begun to deliver both students and employers agility, flexibility, and personalization and there is much more to come yet.

Of course as it has for millennia, education will continue to be both a compelling indicator and a powerful instrument of human progress, although it will almost certainly take us beyond our comfort zone.

I do hope you’ll enjoy the rest of today, it looks a fabulous program – an important opportunity to explore ideas, to reflect and to learn from others. An also an opportunity to establish new networks and to affirm existing ones.

And for your diary for next year – we plan to host the 2017 Careers Practitioners Seminar at our Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus. It will give us the opportunity to show you our superb new facilities including:

~ Deakin’s Centre for Advanced design in Engineering (CADET) – which houses some of the best future-focused engineering and design facilities in Australia including 3D printing and a virtual reality lab
~ the $477m 260-bed teaching hospital - a joint venture between Deakin and Epworth hospital between Deakin and Epworth Healthcare.
~ the multi-million dollar elite sporting complex with its MCG-sized oval, international-standard eight lane 400m athletics track, FIFA-grade soccer pitch”.

We will of course be organising transport for those who need it.