Training program to develop science and technology skills

EMPLOYMENT Minister Tom Kenyon will visit Mount Gambier today to introduce the government’s Skills for All training program.

Mr Kenyon will attend Grant High School’s Flexible Learning Centre and the Rotary Careers Expo at the TAFESA campus.

Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) field courses have been identified as priorities for the state and are now fee-free for the first time under the Skills for All reform of vocational education and training.

“Our state’s future prosperity will rely on nurturing a culture of innovation and this means investing in skills which lead to jobs in the STEM fields,” Mr Kenyon said.

“STEM skills are critical in reaping the benefits of our emerging industries and digital economy.”

“It’s critical that our two strategies, Skills for All and STEM, align with our public and private investment in research and development to support our knowledge-intensive advanced manufacturing and services sector.

“The 26 fee-free courses include a Certificate III in Telecommunications - vital to ensuring the successful roll out of the National Broadband Network throughout South Australia - and an Advanced Diploma of Computer Systems Technology - critical for jobs in our growing defence industry.”

The importance of our advanced manufacturing industry is also supported by a Diploma of Electrical Engineering.”

Member for Mount Gambier Don Pegler will accompany Mr Kenyon on his visit.
Unlocking universe secrets

A SUPERCOMPUTER which will help unlock some of the secrets of the universe is set to be installed at Technology Park next year. The $33 million computer, set to be built at the Pawsey Centre in Bentley, will process data collected by the Australian Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Pathfinder radio telescope.

Science and Research Minister Chris Evans said the supercomputer would be operational by March. “What is happening is the modern-day equivalent of landing on the moon, and it is happening right here in our own backyard,” he said. The project is a joint effort between WA’s four public universities and the CSIRO.
VICTORIAN agricultural courses will continue to be offered despite cuts being made to the TAFE sector across Victoria, according to Victorian Farmers Federation president Peter Tuohey said.

The assurance that courses would continue was given at a meeting last week with the Office of the Minister for Higher Education and Skills.

The VFF has expressed concerns that as enrolments have dropped for these course, cuts to TAFE funding could see agricultural courses disappear, causing a continuing employment problem for the agricultural sector.

"It is therefore reassuring that the government intends to provide greater funding for students wishing to undertake study in Certificate III and IV Agriculture courses. Unfortunately funding for the base entry course into Agriculture Certificate II will see a reduction in funding," Mr Tuohey said.

Mr Tuohey reinforced to government at the meeting the need to have ongoing regional training providers offer agricultural courses, to ensure a skilled workforce for the future.

He also called on all students to consider a career in agriculture where there are many opportunities for employment and advancement.

The VFF will be monitoring the future funding of TAFE's to ensure agriculture courses continue to be provided at acceptable funding levels.

Mr Tuohey said country TAFEs and private training colleges provide an essential service for regional communities and should be protected.
Cultivating more to do agriculture

THE NSW farming industry will examine how to recruit more young people through a wide-ranging study into agricultural education and training.

Former Charles Sturt University agriculture dean Jim Pratley has been chosen to head the inquiry, which will make recommendations on whether the state’s agriculture education sector can respond to industry needs.

Professor Pratley will assess the quality of school, tertiary and vocational education programs as well as consider projected industry needs and ways to promote careers in agriculture.

Primary Industries Minister Katrina Hodgkinson said the study was essential to both the agriculture industry and the economy.

“When agriculture contributes around $9 billion to the NSW economy every year, it is incumbent on us to ensure agricultural education and training in this state is second to none,” Ms Hodgkinson said yesterday.

NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli said school students needed a better understanding of food and fibre production. Prof Pratley is to report his findings by June 2013.

AAP
Tourism project offers assistance

TOURISM businesses facing labour and skills pressure could be offered support through a new $8.5 million workforce development project and local businesses could benefit.

The Tourism and Hospitality Skills and Workforce Development Project, launched recently by Minister for Tourism Martin Ferguson and Minister for Skills Chris Evans, would offer tailored one-on-one help to up to 2000 predominantly small tourism businesses.

This would be done through a $4.4m advisory service; a further $2.4m will be spent to offer training programs on a co-contribution basis to ensure employee training is aligned to businesses’ current and future needs.

“Tourism is a labour intensive industry. To lift productivity and service quality we need to continue to invest in its people,” Mr Ferguson said.

A further $1.7m would enhance the Tourism Employment Plans being rolled out in a number of tourism hotspots across the country and throughout regional areas. TEPS aim to provide tailored strategies to link industry with Government programs to support recruitment and retention of workers in regions reliant on tourism.

Kalgoorlie Boulder Pure Gold general manager Danielle Robertson applauded the scheme.

“It’s great to see the Federal Government support tourism this way – in particular the small tourism operators,” Ms Robertson said. She said positive impacts would be many, including further employee skills development and increased industry professionalism.

“With labour supply a continuous concern for tourism operators, the additional training will provide much-needed leverage to attract and retain staff,” she said.

Quest Yelverton Kalgoorlie owner John Toreresi was equally enthusiastic about the scheme.

“Developing skills and a career path for employees would be a major breakthrough,” he said.

“Absolutely we need this sort of thing – it’s a very positive step forward.

“I’ve lost staff to the mining industry and it’s a big problem for the hospitality industry.”

For more information visit www.tourism.gov.au/labour.

WENDY LAVENDER
Don’t forget that added extra: fees

Kevin Lamond conveniently left out one figure in his sums (Letters, July 27). Private schools, even local Catholic ones, collect fees from parents, and while they may vary greatly they still need to be included.

Those of us in public schools do not need to feel grateful to those private school parents who are supposedly “saving” the government education funding. Even the conservative NSW government seems to realise that additional education funding now must be based on needs rather than wants – a premise of many private schools for years.

Sharon McGuinness Thirroul

I like your logic, Kevin Lamond. As a childless taxpayer using neither the public nor private education systems I heartily look forward to receiving my tax rebate in the post.

Jason Purvis Balmain
Blunder a threat to foreign job visas

RUSSELL SKELTON

THE legal status of about 135,000 decisions made by a body set up by the Howard government to vet the qualifications and experience of foreign workers is under a cloud after a series of bureaucratic and ministerial gaffes.

Both Joe Hockey and Julia Gillard, in their respective roles as employment and workplace ministers, failed to ratify Trades Recognition Australia — a body set up in 2007 — as a relevant authority under the Migration Act to ensure foreign workers met Australian standards before being approved for employment.

The embarrassing oversight came to light in March when lawyers for Indian national Gurinder Singh successfully overturned a decision by the Migration Review Tribunal to refuse him a visa on the grounds that he had provided false information about his work experience.

 Lawyers for Mr Singh argued that although he provided misleading information to Trades Recognition Australia (TRA), it was not relevant because the agency had not been confirmed in writing by the minister as the relevant authority, a requirement contained in the enabling legislation.

A spokesman for the Minister for Tertiary Education and Skills, Senator Chris Evans, this week confirmed the blunder in a two-line statement to The Saturday Age, adding that steps had been taken to rectify the situation.

Sources in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations told The Saturday Age this week it was a "monumental stuff-up" with implications for 135,000 skilled assessments made between 2007 and 2011. Figures released by the department show the TRA approved 99,433 skills assessments and rejected 35,908.

"It seems the paperwork just sat in the ministers' in-tray for years and they never got to it," was how another government source described the blunder.

Immigration experts last night said they believed the blunder would have profound implications for thousands of visa applications. But they said until each case was examined in detail it would be impossible to calculate precisely how many applicants would be adversely affected.

An Immigration Department spokesman said only 12,000 people under the general skilled migration program would be affected. "We don't believe the number will be anywhere near 135,000 because not all decisions..."
Blunder clouds foreign job visas

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relate directly to the TRA.”

Although the anomaly had been fixed in October last year, the spokesman said a review of the caseload affected had been ordered. No appeal was planned.

The Howard government set up TRA in 2007, but it was not properly empowered as the relevant assessing authority until 2011 by the Gillard government.

Joe Hockey, now the opposition treasury spokesman, said he had no recollection of the TRA or the legislative requirement. “It was an election year and Joe has no memory of it,” a spokesman said.

The oversight leaves a question mark over the legal status of thousands of workers employed on major resources projects as well as in the construction industry. In 2010 and 2011 about 50,000 457-category visas were granted. Last year 11,290 Australian and overseas employers were approved to sponsor 457 visas.

Lawyers for Mr Singh argued before the Federal Magistrates Court that the TRA had not been approved as the relevant assessing authority for his occupation as a cook and therefore the issue should not have been decided by the Migration Tribunal. They argued that the TRA had not been empowered by the education or employment minister.

In the past, the TRA has come under criticism from applicants wishing to obtain trade recognition so they can lodge applications. Applicants also complained to the Ombudsman that it was not clear why they had received adverse decisions.