WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR TAN KOK YAM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SKILLSFUTURE SINGAPORE & CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE FOR ADULT LEARNING COUNCIL AT THE GLOBAL LIFELONG LEARNING SUMMIT ON 1 OCTOBER 2024, AT GRAND COPTHORNE WATERFRONT HOTEL

Professor Tan Tai Yong, President of Singapore University of Social Sciences
Associate Professor Yeo Li Pheow, Executive Director of Institute for Adult Learning
Distinguished Guests
Ladies & Gentlemen

1.   A very good morning to those who are here with us today at the Global Lifelong Learning Summit (GLLS) 2024, and also to our online audience. It is a pleasure to see all of you gathered here. To our international speakers, panellists, and delegates from around the world, a very warm welcome to Singapore.

2.   We are very pleased to be supported by our international partners, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The is our second Summit following the inaugural event in 2022. Our joint aspiration is for this Summit to be an impactful global platform for administrators, industrialists, technologists, and researchers, to engage in dialogue to advance lifelong learning, to exchange ideas, and build on opportunities and developments.

3.   This year's Summit theme is about human flourishing in the age of Artificial Intelligence. AI has become a buzzword in recent times. AI as a concept, and its related technologies, have in fact been around for decades; but the more recent advancements have really caught public attention and imagination. All of us have had our fair share of conferences and roundtables and seminars on the rapid developments in the field, especially Gen-AI, its most recent incarnation. Many acknowledge that AI has well demonstrated its potential to transform business models and bring great value to enterprises and consumers. Many also express a level of concern about disruptions to work, and to the workplace.

4.   Over the next two days, we hope to collectively address three questions.

5.   First, the "man versus machine" question. This is the question that naturally captures the greatest public imagination. It is also an age-old narrative. When the mechanical weaving loom first appeared in the early 19th century, textile workers whose jobs were affected stuck their shoes at the machines to sabotage their operations. A more genteel expression of that is the five matches between AlphaGo and Lee Sedol, which many of us here may have tuned into.

5.   This Summit will not require you to take your shoes off, and throw them at data servers. In fact, we would discourage that. But we do wish to discuss the complementarity between human competencies and machine competencies, what machines are good at, versus what humans are good at. This is not an intellectual exercise. The practical value is to help address this question: as AI advances, what skills will be in greater demand, what training and development is of greater value to the workforce, for now and for the future.

6.   Second, the "man with machine" question, or the question of augmentation. How do humans work well with AI, to raise productivity, quality and living standards? Part of the equation has to do with digital access, to familiarise different segments of the population with the new AI tools, and so prosper together from the digital revolution. Part of the equation is also about redesigning jobs and operating models at the enterprise or organisational level, to maximise human-machine collaboration. We will hear from Singapore's Minister for Education Minister Chan who will deliver the Summit's keynote, on a national, ecosystem response to rapid technological developments.

7.   Third, the "machine for man" question, or more precisely, "machine learning for human learning". How do the machines that learn help us learn better too? For example, a major challenge of adult learning is the heterogeneity of the class – people come in with different levels of expertise, different sorts of work experience, and different types of motivation. AI tools have enabled deep personalisation in advertising, retailing and customer service. Might similar approaches and techniques apply to adult learning, to overcome the heterogeneity? Beside the various keynotes and sessions,

we have also invited ed-tech companies to put up showcases to share their ideas and products, and we hope you are able to visit them.

8.   More importantly, we hope that you have both time and opportunity to make connections with old and new colleagues and friends, and plant the seeds of future collaboration and exchange. There is much more to be done, and we are better off doing this collaboratively, tapping on one another's strengths and expertise. SkillsFuture Singapore Agency and the Institute for Adult Learning are certainly eager to form new partnerships and pursue new ideas.

9.   On this note, I look forward to the discussions and networking with our international and local speakers alike, and I wish all of you a very productive and fruitful conference. Thank you.