

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR ONG YE KUNG, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION (HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS) AT THE ADULT LEARNING SYMPOSIUM 2016
3 NOVEMBER 2016, 9.00AM, SANDS EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTRE**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I started the Adult Learning Symposium back in 2008 when I was the Chief Executive of Singapore Workforce Development Agency. Therefore, now years later, I am happy to join you today for the Adult Learning Symposium 2016.

Key Tenets of Training and Adult Education Sector

2. Singapore has a strong Training and Adult Education sector, which comprises a diverse landscape of public and private providers, supported by a community of training and adult educators. Our providers include post-secondary education institutions such as ITE and Polytechnics, and 450 private providers offering training across many sectors. What we have today took many years to build, and is based on a few underlying tenets.

3. First, relevance to industry needs. This is why all training programmes supported by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) have to be industry validated. This is also why Polytechnics and ITE continually engage industries in developing curriculum and programmes that bridge the world of school and work, such as enhanced internships and the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme.

4. The second tenet is about maintaining high standards of training quality. This is why SSG has developed a comprehensive system of quality assurance, and it conducts annual surveys of training outcomes with individuals who have gone through training programmes that it supports. Two weeks ago, the Committee for Private Education announced recent regulatory changes for private education institutions which offer external degree programmes – which is also in line with this key tenet.

5. Third, is to empower individual workers. Since the mid-2000s, the Government shifted its support for adult workers training from funding employers to train their workers, to supporting workers directly. Supporting individual-initiated training empowers workers to take charge of their own career development, and pursue their own aspirations and interests, with guidance

from the network of career counsellors run by CDCs and NTUC. More recently, we pushed this idea further, through the granting of the SkillsFuture Credit to all adult Singaporeans from age 25. The SkillsFuture Credit scheme is so successful that Singaporeans forget about the other SkillsFuture initiatives. In fact, the whole training landscape can be likened to an iceberg. It is a robust system and SkillsFuture Credit is a small portion of it.

Staying the Course – Pushing for Excellence

6. These key tenets are still very relevant in today's context. In fact, they are now undertaken by the national SkillsFuture movement. The TAE sector must be able to incorporate these tenets in your daily work as our partner in SkillsFuture.

7. Over the past 10 years, there have been several key initiatives that have shaped the TAE sector and enhanced its role. In 2005, the TAE WSQ framework was established to deepen the capabilities and professionalism of TAE practitioners. This paved the way for the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) and the Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education (DACE). These two programmes form the backbone for quality Adult Educators and Curriculum Developers.

8. In 2012, WSQ training providers were progressively required to ensure that their trainers and curriculum developers obtained ACTA and DACE certifications. Starting from this year, we took another step to raise the quality in the TAE sector, as the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) took over the delivery of all ACTA and DACE programmes. As a result, IAL to the TAE sector is like NIE to teachers. This enables us to make a concerted push to continue to raise the professionalism of AEs.

9. IAL is also offering four Masters degrees that cover the key areas of adult education. They have attracted a very high-quality intake of professionals from the TAE community. Their occupations are diverse, from managers, researchers to bankers and nurses, from public and private organisations. They are taking on TAE roles in their job role either as a main component of their work, or as a supporting function. To date, 160 professionals had graduated across the four programmes, and another 137 are in the midst of completing their studies.

10. As a result of these initiatives, quality in the TAE sector has increased significantly. We will continue to actively encourage those in the TAE community to continue to upgrade and pursue skills mastery.

11. The TAE sector has to continue to be responsive to the changing needs of the economy and industries. How do we stay the course and push for excellence? The TAE Skills Council, which is led by SSG and involves key industry stakeholders, has been working together over the last few months to develop a comprehensive TAE Sector Transformation Plan to chart the way for the sector going forward. The following are the key thrusts of the Plan.

Strategic Partner to Businesses and Individuals

12. First, the sector will need to take steps to transform from being a service provider to becoming a strategic partner to businesses and individuals.

13. As TAE providers, you will have to rethink your own business models. Many of you know that businesses and individuals are now looking for more than trainers or subject matter experts. Many may not even know what they need. TAE professionals must be able to understand the challenges of businesses, their skills requirement, and play a part to help them raise their game.

14. To do so effectively, the TAE sector will need to significantly strengthen its capacity to understand current and future skills needs of businesses and individuals. To do so, it must keep abreast of the developmental trends of the sector – trends that CEOs and Boards of Directors are worried about, and understand what skills are in demand for the market you are serving.

15. In my years of observing the TAE industry, one major area that needs your help is to codify the knowledge, skills and expertise of that reside within organisations. Often, these are developed through experience by an earlier generation of workers, many of whom may not even have proper skills and academic qualifications. But with their retirement we risk losing those expertise altogether. We don't have to look very far to find an example of this happening – just look at our hawker stalls – our hawker masters are having difficulty passing on their trade. There is a big opportunity for professional help here – to codify the skills, translate into training curriculum, so that the capability can be passed down and be built upon.

Leveraging Technology

16. Second, SSG will continue to support the TAE community in its push for excellence. There are several initiatives under the Transformation Plan to achieve this.

17. We are actively supporting the use of technology in learning. iN.LEARN 2020 was announced in October last year to encourage training providers to adopt technology-enabled learning, with \$27 million set aside over the next three years. Good progress has been made. For example, \$1.5 million in support of 8 projects had already been committed under the e-learning development grant. We have also filled almost 4,000 training places for courses that help the TAE sector adopt e-learning tools and select the right learning technology.

Focusing on Outcomes

18. Third, SSG will increase information transparency by requiring training providers that receive direct funding to participate in a trainee outcomes survey. Results obtained will be published, which will enable businesses and individuals to make more informed choices on which training provider to partner and which courses to enrol for. At the same time, SSG will also enable qualitative feedback from learners. The information will help the TAE sector improve its products and services to meet the needs of its customers. SSG will start doing so from October 2017.

Higher Professionalism

19. Last but not least, TAE providers must play your part to help training professionals develop new and emerging skills, deepen their existing knowledge in their fields, and further professionalise the trade. The Adult Educators' Professionalisation (AEP) initiative sets the standards and accredits established practitioners to recognise them for their contributions and professional and pedagogical excellence.

20. Ms Jessline Yap exemplifies this. Jessline is currently an adjunct Adult Educator with IAL conducting the Workplace Training and ACTA programmes. As a strong believer in embracing continual learning and growth to change the lives of others around her, she actively pursues other professional development courses such as DACE and a Bachelor of Arts in English with Psychology to stay abreast and skilled in emerging areas for TAE professionals. Keep it up Jessline!

21. To support more professionals to be like Jessline, SSG is developing a SkillsFuture Study Award for deserving adult educators to deepen their skills and raise their professional standards. The SkillsFuture Study Awards can also be used for the four Masters programmes offered at IAL.

22. Our Autonomous Universities (AUs) are setting up adult training units and this is an encouraging development. Adult education would require different training philosophy and approach. I hope that over time, such units can be the research and development (R&D) department within our AUs, where they can constantly be in touch with the industry to learn from them. With a short production cycle, they can come up with short modular programmes that are relevant to the industry. The AUs should absorb some of this knowledge and practices into the undergraduate programmes. This is the opposite of today's practice of modularising undergraduate programmes to deliver to adults.

23. **Conclusion**

24. The development of the TAE sector is a joint mission between the professionals, the industries and the Government. In this era of SkillsFuture, you play a critical and decisive role. Training is not just delivering a lecture and showing slides, but you dive into the dreams, hopes and fears of your trainees, and help them develop. You hone their skills and raise their game to a higher level, but more importantly, if you are really good at what you are doing, you uncover their passions and interests, and activate inner motivations.

25. SSG cannot do what you can, but it can support you with resources, authoritative accreditation and spreading important public messages. Much work has already been done, but we will partake this journey together for years to come. I wish you a fruitful Adult Learning Symposium 2016.