

Speech by Mr Gan Kim Yong, Acting Minister for Manpower, at the Opening of the Adult Learning Symposium and The Launch of the Institute for Adult Learning 4 December 2008

Mr Chan Heng Kee, Chief Executive, Singapore Workforce Development Agency
Dr Gary Willmott, Executive Director, Institute for Adult Learning

Distinguished Speakers and Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Introduction

I am pleased to join you today for the opening of the Adult Learning Symposium and launch of the Institute of Adult Learning or IAL in short. The launch of IAL is an important development in our efforts to build the national capability in adult learning.

Adult Education in the Early Years

2. We embarked on adult learning as early as the 1960s. The Adult Education Board was formed then, tasked with planning, regulating and implementing adult education. In the 1980s, three national Continuing Education and Training (CET)

programmes were launched by the then Vocational and Industrial Training Board. They were better known as BEST (The Basic Education for Skills Training), WISE (Work Improvement through Secondary Education) and MOST (Modular Skills Training). These programmes helped adults acquire technical skills qualification as well as receive basic education in English and Mathematics. In 2000, the introduction of the National Skills Recognition System (NSRS) and the 1-Institute- 2 Systems framework (1I2S) in the Polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education helped adults further improve their skills.

The CET Masterplan and the Need for A Quality CET Profession

3. In 2003, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) was formed to develop a competitive workforce and build a strong national CET infrastructure. WDA has since introduced the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) system, Employability Skills System (ESS) as well as established CET Centres in growth areas.

4. Earlier this year, we announced a National CET Masterplan to prepare our workers for the future, help them seize opportunities in new growth areas and advance their careers through the acquisition of skills. We will ramp up the national CET training capacity, ensure better integration of the CET and our formal education systems; and reach out to more workers. We now have 42 CET Centres. We will set up more CET Centres and the number of training places will be ramped up significantly from 110,000 in FY 08 to 220,000 in FY 09 through the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience, or SPUR.

5. But expansion in our training capacity alone will not be effective unless the training programmes are of high quality and we have professional adult trainers to deliver them. Training of adults is quite different from the training of younger students. Adult trainers must be equipped with the right skills.

6. Singapore's formal education has been well regarded internationally. One important factor of our success is the quality of our teachers and the quality of the teacher-training programmes offered by the National Institute of Education. Similarly, training of CET trainers and adult educators plays an important part in ensuring that CET trainers are adequately trained and equipped to train adults. As we build up our infrastructure under the CET Masterplan, there will be greater demand for CET trainers. The set up of the IAL is therefore timely. The IAL will be dedicated to training and developing qualified adult trainers, raising the standards of the profession and conducting research to continually improve our CET system over time. This is an important milestone in our journey towards a first-class CET system.

Role of IAL

7. The IAL will play a leading role in three areas: the development of the CET profession in Singapore through establishing standards and delivering training for CET professionals, nurturing a community of CET professionals in Singapore, and advancing thought leadership in adult learning so that we can continually improve the effectiveness of our CET programmes.

Developing Professional Pathways and Training

8. Firstly, IAL will develop the CET profession through establishing clear professional standards and pathways for adult educators. From 2009, IAL will introduce a new national Professional Development Framework (PDF) targeted at adult educators. This is developed in collaboration with the polytechnics, ITEs, private training organisations and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), so that it serves the needs of trainers from different backgrounds. The framework outlines clear qualifications, skills and competencies needed for CET professionals, and also serves as a guide for development, performance and career pathway for adult educators.

9. Under this new framework, the IAL will develop and deliver programmes to train and upskill adult educators. It will deliver a range of nationally recognised WSQ programmes and qualifications. These will go beyond the current range of certificate-level programmes. IAL will introduce the new Diploma in Continuing Education and Training in April 2009.

Growing a Community of CET Professionals

10. Secondly, IAL will work with adult educators to grow the community of CET professionals in Singapore. This includes CET professionals in polytechnics, private training organizations, consultant trainers and curriculum developers, trainers in the SAF and companies which have their own accredited training centres. IAL will help to build this community through a professional membership and development scheme, which will also be a key component of the Professional Development Framework.

11. This scheme is similar to those currently available in other countries such as the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). Administered by IAL, the scheme will facilitate the recognition of the professional standing, performance and competencies of CET professionals. It will establish a code of professional ethics underpinning the roles and responsibilities of CET professionals. It will also serve as a platform where the professionals can learn from one another.

Advancing Thought Leadership in Adult Learning

12. The third area where IAL will play a key role is in advancing thought leadership by undertaking research in adult learning and best practices in CET. This research will be translated into direct and practical inputs into improving our CET system. In

this regard, IAL will leverage on its capability to provide support and advisory services in curriculum, assessment and training practices to the new CET Centres established by WDA. In addition, we can expect more programmes like today's symposium, with both international and local thought leaders, to engage our practitioners.

A New Professionals Conversion Programme for CET Professionals

13. With the current economic downturn, the imperative to provide training to re-skill and up-skill workers to enhance their employability has become even more pressing. IAL will play a key role in supporting SPUR, by improving the quality and increasing the number of trainers. As part of this effort, IAL will introduce a new Professionals Conversion Programme for those who wish to transit to a new career as a CET professional.

Conclusion

14. In conclusion, let me reiterate that all of you working in the CET field play a key role in helping workers upgrade their skills and employability, as well as in raising the overall competitiveness of our workforce. It is therefore important that you continue to enhance your professional skills and capabilities. It is ultimately through your professionalism that the goal of a vibrant, skilled and competitive workforce can be achieved.

15. I wish the Institute for Adult Learning every success, and look forward to seeing it strengthen the CET landscape and contributing to the advancement of our workers through quality training.

Thank you.