

# Speech by Minister For Manpower, Mr Gan Kim Yong, at The Adult Learning Symposium At The Grand Copthorne Waterfront Hotel

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1. Good morning. I am pleased to join you today at the Adult Learning Symposium. In particular, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our overseas speakers and participants.

## Introduction

2. Over the last few years, Singapore has been expanding our national Continuing Education and Training (CET) infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness and productivity of our workforce. In 2005, we introduced the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications System (WSQ) – a national competency-based CET system. To date, over 500,000 workers have benefited from the WSQ programmes.

## Important Role of WSQ Providers and Professionals

3. Beyond increasing the capacity of CET programmes, we must pay equal attention to ensuring the “quality” of WSQ programmes. Ultimately, whether WSQ courses lead to positive outcomes for employers and workers depends on the quality of the

curriculum, training delivery and assessment – all of which lie in the hands of our training providers and adult educators.

4. To ensure that WSQ training providers meet required standards, WDA has put in place a rigorous quality assurance system. I am pleased to note that WSQ providers have delivered high quality courses over the years and they continue to make improvements. Some, such as At-Sunrice Global Chef Academy, the Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology and the Tourism Management Institute of Singapore – have gone further and attained the WSQ National CET Institute status in recognition of their excellence.
5. In addition to enhancing institutional-level standards, we have also invested in raising the capability of WSQ adult educators. We launched the Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA) in 2005. This gives adult educators a strong grounding in pedagogical training, necessary to help adult learners overcome training barriers and acquire industry-relevant skills. With the setting up of the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) two years ago, complementary efforts in research, communities of practice and knowledge sharing platforms, such as today's symposium, have also been added.
6. One example of an adult educator who has capitalised on these opportunities is Ms Nithya Ramaswamy. In 2006, her employer, Service Quality Centre – a CET Centre specialising in Service Excellence – sent her for the ACTA course. With the training and assessment skills she gained, she has gone on to assume more responsibilities, including curriculum-development. Ms Nithya continued with her upgrading journey and is now undertaking the Master of Arts in Lifelong Learning, offered with the University of London.
7. Looking ahead, the demand for skilled talent will continue to grow. The Government has committed to invest more in CET and reach out to more Professionals,

Managers and Executives (PMEs). We will also continue to raise and improve the quality of our training programmes. Let me briefly share with you how this will be done.

## Full Suite of Programmes for Adult Educators to Upgrade

8. To help all adult educators hone their skills, we will strengthen the adult-training upgrading pathway. Capacity in the existing Advanced Certificate and the new Diploma programmes under the WSQ Training Framework will be expanded, while a new Workplace Training Programme for in-house providers will be launched.
9. Beyond these programmes, IAL will offer another joint Masters programme with a leading overseas university. This is on top of the Master of Arts in Lifelong Learning introduced earlier this year, offered with the University of London. The new Master of Training and Development offered with Australia's Griffith University will be available in early 2011. Shorter executive programmes tailored for CET professionals to broaden and deepen their skillsets in subjects such as leadership, business management, and developing research capability are also in the pipeline.

## Research and Innovation in CET

10. To encourage new and innovative ideas for the enhancement of workforce learning, and in turn improve our workers' employability and competitiveness, we are setting aside \$3 million over the next two years for a new CET Innovation Fund.
11. Training providers and professionals can tap on the fund to pilot new and innovative CET methods. So far, we have seen good ideas coming forward from the community with 24 applications received from 19 organisations. These include interactive

technology to facilitate adult learning, software to assist in curriculum and programme design, as well as the creation of learning labs to better mirror real-life scenarios.

12. I am therefore pleased to announce the first batch of four recipients of the CET Innovation Fund. The Singapore Institute for Retail Studies (SIRS) – a CET Centre for Retail WSQ programmes – is among them. SIRS aims to leverage on computer software to create a “practice laboratory”, where trainees can experiment with their new-found knowledge of Visual Merchandising to develop new display concepts and ideas. It is also developing software and processes which can help trainers customise training curriculum for use at the workplace, to make learning more relevant and effective.
13. The other innovative ideas include the use of hand-held devices to facilitate mobile on-the-job learning in the workplace by a consortium led by New Business Development Academy, an innovation consulting and training company; as well as a programme which seamlessly blends computer-aided lessons and classroom sessions by Kaplan Professional. HMI Institute of Health Services will also spearhead a pilot project that simulates a hospital setting, so that healthcare trainees can be exposed to real-life scenarios and be better prepared when they enter the workforce.
14. Besides the CET Innovation Fund, a \$4.5 million research grant has been committed to IAL, to develop capabilities to conduct high quality research. Through the research projects, we hope to establish a network of local and foreign institutions and experts to build knowledge and capabilities in the adult education sector.
15. Growing this research capability is crucial as we continue to grow and develop our CET system. Take for instance a recently-concluded IAL study reveals that, contrary to popular belief, workers aged 45 and above overwhelmingly reported strong

desires to continue to work and learn, and to maintain their employability. But these workers are vulnerable to workplace practices which might undermine their sense of worth and confidence, and hence their interest in training and their careers. The research will also give practical insights into the teaching methodology and policy changes that would be necessary to promote lifelong employability. It would certainly help adult educators in designing appropriate training programmes for mature learners.

16. Research at IAL will also examine and evaluate the relevance of current CET courses. Its findings would be important to help us enhance the effectiveness of our CET programmes, as adult workers need relevant and applicable skills so as to make a real difference in their jobs and in their lives.

17. The development of a strong network of international experts and institutions means that IAL will be able to tap on strong global expertise, such as Professor Stephen Billett from Griffith University who led and mentored a local group of aspiring researcher-practitioners to do fieldwork and helped them begin their own projects, while he was a visiting fellow at IAL.

## Conclusion

18. Ladies and Gentlemen, to build up a world-class CET system anchored on the WSQ, providers and professionals will need to continually raise standards in design and delivery to meet the ever rising needs of workers and employers.

19. The Adult Learning Symposium is an example of our effort to sustain and enhance the learning and practice of adult educators. The research I mentioned and other studies will be presented at the symposium, over the next two days. I am happy to learn that we have some 400 delegates at this year's event and I am confident that



they will benefit from the symposium. On this note, let me wish all of you a productive and enjoyable symposium.

Thank you.