

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY MR NG CHER PONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
SINGAPORE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AGENCY,
AT THE ADULT LEARNING SYMPOSIUM 2014,
RAFFLES CITY CONVENTION CENTRE
ON FRIDAY 11 JULY 2014, AT 4.25PM**

Distinguished guests and speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

We have come to the end of the 5th Adult Learning Symposium 2014. On behalf of WDA and IAL, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the speakers and participants, for your contributions and participation towards the success of this Symposium.

Since its formation in 2003, WDA has focused on building a strong foundation for our national CET system. Today, we have more than one million individuals trained under the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications or WSQ framework, and over 50 CET centres that offer individuals direct access to subsidised quality training. Through the collective efforts of WDA, employers, industry associations, unions, training providers and adult educators, we now have a comprehensive national CET system covering 34 WSQ frameworks. The national CET system enables Singaporeans to acquire the necessary competencies to perform well in their jobs, and to continue to deepen their skills. And for those who wish to switch careers, including entering emerging sectors, a range of conversion programmes are available to assist them to acquire new skills. These are achievements that collectively, we have every reason to be proud of.

But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels and be complacent. First, the external environment has become much more volatile and complex. Some of you may be familiar with the acronym “VUCA”, which is increasingly used to describe the external environment we are in – “Volatile”, “Uncertain”, “Complex” and “Ambiguous”. Driven partly by technology and automation, such an environment has significant impact on an open and small economy such as Singapore. With faster skills obsolescence, the role of CET in enabling enterprises and individuals to respond to the new skills requirements becomes even more critical. Second, the profile of our workforce is changing rapidly. Not only will we see an increase in the proportion of older workers over the next few years, the new entrants to the workforce are increasingly better qualified, with more of them having obtained at least a NITEC or Higher NITEC from the Institute of Technical Education. The skills requirements of the workforce and how they learn will therefore be different.

Over yesterday and today, the distinguished speakers at the Symposium have not only affirmed these changes, but also shared their insights on the impact of these changes at different levels. I believe Poi Shan, in her role as the theme-weaver, has already summarised the key points earlier this afternoon. What I will do is to selectively highlight three points and build on them:

Dr Shahid elaborated on the public policy implications. First, CET will play a more prominent role in ensuring the competitive advantage of a nation to be globally competitive. This is because with increased skills obsolescence, it is no longer adequate to possess a

strong education system. Instead, a productive networked system of innovation and learning which supports workplace-based learning and continuous learning is equally, if not, more important. Second, he reminded us – and this was a point echoed by several speakers in different forms – that focusing solely on supplying skills alone will not achieve better outcomes for enterprises and individuals. Instead, we should be equally concerned about the demand side, which is how these skills are utilised at workplaces.

Professor Andrew Ng talked about the opportunities afforded by Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs to enable learning, particularly adult learning. His anecdotes of how MOOCs have democratised access to continuing education and how individuals across the globe have harnessed their newly-acquired skills and knowledge to transform their life circumstances also inspires us to re-think how we can deliver education. The appeal of MOOCs, particularly to adult learners, who can now be re-trained anytime and anywhere is clear. This is the key success factor why Coursera now has more than 8 million users!

We have also heard from several speakers about the use of technology in adult learning. Dr Matt Bower, for example, wowed us with the possibilities of Augmented Reality and its potential to push the frontiers of how we currently use technology - from a primarily two dimensional experience, to one which is far more interactive, immersive and impactful. The use of technology in adult learning is an absorbing topic, and all of us have heard different speakers affirm how technology is not the bottleneck. We should take the opportunity to reflect on how as adult educators, we can purposefully tap on technology to deepen the engagement of learners and enhance the effectiveness and quality of workplace learning. We should be prepared to experiment but must also critically evaluate whether and how the use of technology has improved learning outcomes – and adjust and adapt accordingly.

Overall, what is also clear from the discussions is that to remain relevant to industries and the workforce, the national CET system will have to keep pace with and stay ahead of these changes. This is why the Minister for Manpower announced a review of the CET Masterplan late last year. Since then, we have made good progress in the review and through numerous small group discussions, we have received invaluable inputs from the different stakeholder groups. We are currently on track to unveiling the new CET masterplan within the next few months.

One key area covered under the review will be enhancing the quality of CET through innovation and the use of technology, and to kickstart this, the Minister has announced several specific initiatives in his Opening Address yesterday. These include the development of CET MOOCs and the setting up of iN.LAB at the Lifelong Learning Institute. WDA is fully committed to working closely with all of you to build a robust, responsiveness and vibrant CET community, and through these new initiatives, we will continue to strengthen our partnership and improve how we collectively support adult learners and industries.

On behalf of WDA and IAL, I thank you all for attending this year's Adult Learning Symposium.

Thank you.