

Speech by NMP Thomas Chua, President of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, for the Committee of Supply on the Ministry of Education

Meeting Industry Needs, Helping Students with Career Planning

Madam Speaker, Members of Parliament, good afternoon! The 2015 budget has initiated the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme to help match graduates of polytechnics and Institute of Technical Education (ITE) with potential employers. From this year onward, the government will be collaborating with the Retail, Food, and Logistics Sectors to nurture a batch of SkillsFuture Mentors to help SMEs with training their talents. This is very good news!

The role of education is to fulfil the needs of society. Our local talents are trained in a rigorously structured framework. The advantage of this model is being able to upgrade the quality of our workforce as a whole. However, if any industry is being overlooked during the planning phase, there will be gaps in our manpower resources.

Gaps have already appeared in some of the traditional industries. On this note, I urge all industry and trade associations to be actively involved in the planning of our future manpower resources. Not only must they convey their respective industry needs to MOE accurately, they should also support the internship programme wholeheartedly. Through the internship, students can have first-hand experience of the work environment, understand whether their personal interests and strengths can have growth potential in the industry, and help them to chart their future career path. On the other hand, this programme could also help employers to identify the most outstanding young people and recruit talent.

However, we must also realise that larger corporations have the capability to provide internships and attract talents. The SMEs, on the other hand, often lack a proper system in place. But if they do not get involved with manpower resource planning now, the manpower crunch would get even more severe in time to come.

In order to conform to the times, traditional industries and SMEs must also grab the opportunity to improve their overall image. For example, by and large young people are not keen to seek employment as workers wearing singlets in cake shops. But if the boss works hard to improve the work environment and enhance the job's skills value, the requirement would then be to hire a pastry chef clad in a smart uniform which would then project a professional image and satisfaction to the employee.

Going forward, professional education and career counsellors will be assigned to all secondary schools, ITEs, polytechnics and universities. Industry and trade associations must engage closely with these counsellors to ensure that they have adequate and comprehensive industry knowledge, and help them change the stereotypes students have on traditional industries.

I sincerely hope that more trade associations would partake in the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme. At the same time, I would like to understand what yardsticks ITEs and polytechnics use to select industries for their internship programmes. Only if we fully understand what yardsticks and considerations are being used can the owners of traditional industries collaborate with schools in a more purposeful and systematic manner.