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Opening Address by Mr Lawrence Wong, Minister of State for Defence and Education, at the Inaugural Education Innovation Conference, "Education Innovation for Sustainable Growth", on Friday, 11 May 12 at 0915hrs at SUNTEC Convention Centre

Mr Ted Tan, Deputy Chief Executive, SPRING Singapore,

Mr Henry Heng, Chief Executive, Council for Private Education,

Distinguished Speakers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

1.   I am very pleased to join you today for the inaugural Education Innovation Conference 2012 organised by SPRING Singapore. Let me start by extending a warm welcome to our speakers who have come from abroad to share your insights with us.

2.   It is also very heartening to see today's diverse turnout from various education sectors. We have in our midst private education SMEs whose course offerings span between pre-school, corporate and tertiary education, as well as two of our public institutions – the National Institute of Education or NIE, and Republic Polytechnic.

Quality Education for All

3.   Seeking quality in education offerings is an imperative shared by all education institutions, private or public.

4.   Over the years, Singapore has built up a strong brand in education, which has come to be seen as synonymous with quality and with innovation. The achievements of our public school system, for example, in international benchmark tests like Programme for International Student Assessment or PISA are very well documented, and we do well in these tests. Two of our Autonomous Universities are among the top ranked in the world, and we have introduced

new degree pathways through institutions like the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT). These new institutions have partnered best-in-class universities like MIT, Zhejiang University, University of Glasgow, and the Technical University of Munich, just to name a few partners, to provide a range of innovative learning options designed to maximise the potential of our students.

5. Besides the publicly-funded institutions, many Singaporeans also opt for educational offerings by local private players, particularly at the tertiary level. MOE values the role played by our private education sector to provide additional pathways for Singaporeans to upgrade their qualifications and to upgrade their skills.

6.   In line with our overall emphasis on quality education, we would like the private education institutions in Singapore to offer high-quality programmes, to support continuous learning and skills upgrading at all levels of our workforce. This is why MOE has been pushing for higher standards in private education. In 2009, we established the Council for Private Education, or CPE, which set out baseline standards for institutional quality, and also a voluntary EduTrust Certification scheme for higher quality private institutions to distinguish themselves. These regulatory measures resulted in a significant restructuring and consolidation of the industry. Over the years, we have seen significant change and the number of players falling from around 700 in 2009 to 350 today.

Further Restructuring Needed

7.   Going forward, I anticipate that the private education industry will see further restructuring as it confronts several challenges. First, there will be a limit to the number of international students that can be enrolled given Singapore's population constraints. Private institutions therefore can no longer base their business model solely on international student volume, but have to move towards a quality-driven strategy, with higher-quality and more knowledge-intensive courses.

8.   Second, CPE intends to review and strengthen its regulatory framework to encourage more private institutions to focus on quality outcomes. EduTrust currently provides prospective students with a measure of confidence that processes are in place to run a sound organization and student interests are well looked after. But EduTrust is just

the first step in distinguishing quality from baseline requirements. There is much more that can and should be done to raise standards. For example, we can consider enhancing the EduTrust requirements or quality outcomes, or publishing outcome indicators for every institution and programme, so that students can make more informed choices about their education needs. CPE is studying these issues, and will seek industry feedback and views as it seeks to strengthen its regulatory framework.

9.   I firmly believe that further restructuring of the private education sector towards higher quality is a move in the right direction. It will benefit both Singapore and Singaporeans at large. With higher quality programmes, we will, as a country, sharpen our competitive edge and reputation as a provider of quality education. At the same time, Singaporeans will benefit from access to better higher quality education offerings. Nevertheless, I also recognise that the continued

restructuring of the industry can create difficulties for some institutions. In anticipation of these challenges, CPE will not only drive quality through regulatory levers, but will also support the industry through capability-building initiatives.

New Capability-Building Initiatives

10. CPE has embarked on designing such initiatives through partnerships with agencies like IDA, SPRING and STB. Over the past year, CPE has gathered extensive industry feedback to identify areas where capabilities can be enhanced. A number of you present today, such as SMa Institute of Higher Learning and TMC Academy, have contributed much to the recommendations that CPE is coming up with, through your participation in various focus group discussions. CPE has reviewed these recommendations thoroughly, and I am pleased to announce two sets of measures which CPE believes are ready for immediate implementation.

11.   The first initiative involves the aggregated use of information and communications technology or ICT to set up school management systems for smaller private education institutions. These systems will help to streamline key business and administrative processes, achieve greater cost efficiencies, and enhance the learning experience of students.

12.   To keep costs affordable, the CPE and IDA have been working to pool demand from the industry for such systems. In fact, schools can also tap on funding through IDA's iSPRINT scheme, which supports 50 to 70 percent of qualifying costs of ICT adoption by SMEs.   I strongly encourage private education SMEs to tap on this opportunity to upgrade your ICT infrastructure.

13. The second initiative is a new part-time Specialist Diploma in Applied Learning and Teaching by Republic Polytechnic, which will be launched in July this year.

Following feedback from many private institutions, this course in pedagogy, curriculum design and assessment has been developed to improve the instructional skills of private school teachers.

14. The 280-hour programme will be supported by MOE funding under our Continuing Education and Training framework. This will allow eligible trainees to enjoy substantial subsidies for their training and skills upgrading.

15. Besides improving the quality of academic staff, upgrading the capabilities of administrative and management staff is also essential. To achieve this aim, CPE and SPRING are working on other initiatives which will be rolled out in the coming months, and these will help to encourage

stronger corporate governance and sharing of best practices across the industry.

Innovation for Quality Education Outcomes

16. The theme for today's conference – "Education Innovation for Sustainable Growth" – also points to another area where all education institutions, private or public, should pay attention to, and that is, innovation. Education innovation can take many forms. For one, it is crucial for education practices to harness advances in technology to enhance the learning experience of your students.

17. At the same time, education should also evolve through new forms of curricula, pedagogy and assessment, by taking into account individual student needs, as well as the skill sets necessary for our young people to succeed in the future, Learning cannot just be a process of transferring information through rote memorization. It is not about scoring straight As in exams, but mastering the essential skills.

And increasingly in an information-rich world, what you know will be far less important than what you can do with what you know. Our students must have the ability to learn on their own, to create and apply new knowledge in solving problems, and to be ready for whatever the future has in store.

18. At MOE, educational innovation is one of our key priorities. The Ministry, in partnership with NIE, continues to invest in education research to provide our teachers and our schools with tools to transform teaching, and to inspire learning.

19. NIE is in fact launching its Education Innovation Book Series here this afternoon. In this book series, we have documented examples of education innovation over the last 40 years in our public schools. The series also draws comparisons between our experience with education innovation, and the experiences of other successful

education systems around the world. I hope that you will find this book series to be an insightful and useful resource.

Conclusion

20.   The CPE initiatives and innovation resources I have highlighted will help to address some immediate capability gaps in the industry. However, for our private education institutions to ensure competitiveness over the long term, the drive to continually innovate and improve education practices is crucial. I will encourage all private education providers to continue to improve both their institutional and programme quality, to enable the industry to build and leverage on quality as its competitive advantage.

21.   Finally, I extend my appreciation to SPRING Singapore for organising this valuable platform for education providers to learn, share and network. I wish you all a rewarding conference, and a fruitful exchange of views and ideas. Thank you very much.