

**SPEECH BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF TRADE AND
INDUSTRY, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, MS LOW YEN LING AT THE
INAUGURAL JOINT POLY-ITE RETAIL SEMINAR AND CAREER FAIR
2016, WEDNESDAY, 16 NOV 2016, 2.30PM, NANYANG POLYTECHNIC**

Mr Edward Ho, Deputy Principal (Development), Nanyang Polytechnic,
Principals and Deputy Principals of Institutes of Higher Learning,
Members of the Retail Sector Coordination Team,
Distinguished Guests,
Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. A very good afternoon to all of you. I am delighted to join you at the inaugural Joint Poly-ITE Retail Seminar and Career Fair 2016. Gathered here today are friends from the Institute of Technical Education, alongside all five of the polytechnics: Nanyang Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, and Temasek Polytechnic. I hope this joint initiative between ITE and the polytechnics will be the first of many more to come. Most of all, I applaud today's event and combined effort drawing 30 retailers.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

2. Singapore's retail sector spans 21,000 retail establishments, and employs about 3% of the total workforce. In recent times, the retail landscape has changed drastically. Take grocery shopping, you no longer have to go to the supermarket but can get what you want delivered to your doorstep by Cold Storage, NTUC Fairprice or online players like RedMart and Honestbee. More consumers are turning to online shopping for convenience and diversity of options. They have more choices, higher and fast changing expectations. Retailers have to meet these challenges on top of attracting and retaining skilled staff and talent.

3. Despite the headwinds, Singapore retains strong fundamentals in the retail sector. We continue to draw global brands with our vibrant local retail scene and our strategic position in affluent Asia. This year, we announced the launch and expansions of several regional flagship stores here – from French sporting goods retailer Decathlon, to Orchard Road anchors such as Uniqlo, Apple, and Victoria's Secret. The presence of these global brands attest to the many opportunities for retailers in Singapore and Asia.

4. The Retail Industry Transformation Map (ITM), announced by Minister S Iswaran in September this year revealed four pillars of strength that will help our companies and people respond to today's challenges and to seize the opportunities that come their way. They are: productivity, jobs & skills, innovation and internationalisation. For instance, in the retail sector, we want to create a vibrant mix of highly productive omni-channel retailers and local brand owners with global footprints. These businesses in turn, need to be supported by a professional and skilled workforce, which many of you will join in a few years' time. To achieve this, the Government is dedicating substantial resources to the retail sector.

BUILDING A FUTURE-READY RETAIL WORKFORCE

5. One of our key strategies is to build a future-ready and productive retail workforce. Retail jobs will undergo job redesign and the sector will see new jobs being created. To prepare a future-ready retail workforce, our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) have started upgrading their course curricula to equip students with emerging skills for the retail sector.

6. For instance, the School of Business Management at Nanyang Polytechnic has modules on digital marketing. Starting from next year, all business management students will have to take modules on Digital Marketing, Business Analytics and Design Thinking for Innovation. Students at Temasek Polytechnic now have new modules such as retail e-commerce which introduces them to e-retailing, m-commerce and social media applications. They are required to apply what they have learnt in their final year project which involves writing a proposal to start up an e-business. The alignment of curricula to the needs of the retail industry will prepare the students for the new roles they will have to take when they enter the workforce.

7. At the same time, the existing retail workforce needs to upskill to new functions and roles in their jobs. The front-of-house retail workforce have to be familiar with technologies such as the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) that is increasingly used these days. In addition, they have to be more aware of cultural nuances present in global marketplace. Regular upskilling and training sets the foundation needed to drive the next phase of retail industry growth.

RETAIL PRESENTS A PROMISING AND EXCITING CAREER FOR STUDENTS

8. As the retail sector evolves and transforms itself to meet new demands, there are exciting careers and opportunities in the industry. We have two on-going programmes to help students gain a good grasp and understanding of the retail industry.

9. The SkillsFuture Enhanced Internship programme (EI) prepares students for the workplace and arms them with real-life experience and exposure to the retail scene. With clear learning outcomes, mentorship and, where relevant extended periods attachments, this programme allows students and employers to benefit from real work projects. Employers on-board include omni-channel retailers such as Uniqlo and Wing Tai. By February 2017, the Enhanced Internships programme would have been placed over 430 students.

10. Fresh polytechnic and ITE graduates are able to get a head-start in their careers in the retail sector through the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme (ELP). They will be matched with jobs related to their disciplines of study with participating companies, while receiving mentorship, structured on-the-job training and facilitated learning at the Singapore Institute of Retail Studies over the ELP period. This will culminate in a Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) Specialist Diploma in Retail Management, and WSQ Advanced Certificate in Retail Supervision for Polytechnic and ITE graduates, respectively.

11. I note that the five polytechnics, ITE and five retailers have signed a Memorandum of Understanding earlier this year to integrate the enhanced internships with the ELP. For students who successfully completed their enhanced internships with major retailers such as Cold Storage, Charles & Keith, Isetan, Starhub, and Wing Tai during their school days, they can be fast-tracked through their ELP. By recognising their industry experience that they gained during their enhanced internship, they only need to spend 12 months, instead of 18 months, to complete their ELP. This fast-track route enables employers to maintain relationships with the participants and continue to mentor and guide them. This allows for a seamless integration of enhanced internship and the ELP.

12. Let me share with you Maxine Tan's story. Maxine graduated with a Diploma in Retail Management at Temasek Polytechnic, and entered the ELP as an assistant department sales manager in Isetan. She was given the opportunity to learn and specialise in merchandising, and she worked hard to progress to the position of an assistant buyer in 10 months.

STRONG PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION

13. Maxine and many others students have been able to transit smoothly from schools to the workplace due to these programmes that have resulted from the close collaboration between IHLs, trade associations and industry stakeholders.

14. This camaraderie and spirit of collaboration is evident in the today's event where different IHLs and industry platers have banded together to engage our young

and promising future workforce. Together we can transform the retail industry for the better.

CONCLUSION

15. To all of our students here today: take this chance to speak with the 30 retailers of different trades and find out more about the exciting prospects in the retail industry. You have a lot in store for you, and I wish you an informative and fruitful session ahead. I would like to extend my appreciation to Nanyang Polytechnic, the sector coordinator for retail under SkillsFuture, for organising this event, and a big thank you to all the industry players for your participation. May you find many young talents and may success be with you in all your endeavours. Thank you.

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