

**SPEECH BY MR S ISWARAN, MINISTER FOR TRADE AND
INDUSTRY (INDUSTRY), AT SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC'S
57th GRADUATION CEREMONY 2017, FOR THE
PROFESSIONAL & ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION
(PACE) ACADEMY, ON 5 MAY 2017 (FRIDAY), 6.50PM**

Mr Soh Wai Wah, Principal and CEO of Singapore Polytechnic

Members of the Singapore Polytechnic Board of Governors

Distinguished Guests

Graduands

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Good evening. I am delighted to join you this evening to celebrate this special occasion.

2. Today's graduation ceremony marks an important milestone for Singapore Polytechnic's Institutional Medallists, and the 651 graduands from the Professional and Adult Continuing Education (PACE) Academy. It is a fitting recognition of your educational attainments which were achieved even as you continued to work. Your accomplishments are a tribute to your grit, determination and perseverance. My heartiest congratulations to all of you on your well-earned success.

3. I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge those who have steadfastly supported you in this journey. So could you please join me in showing our appreciation to your family, lecturers and friends.

4. Institutions like the Professional and Adult Continuing Education Academy, and graduands like you who have acquired new skills and knowledge even while holding a full-time job, are of special significance and play an important role in the context of today's economy. Let me explain.

5. Rapid technological advancements are fundamentally changing the nature of our economy and the work that we do. To stay competitive and continue to create good jobs for our people, industries have to restructure, business models must adapt, and Singaporeans need to acquire new skills. This is the focus of the Industry

Transformation Maps that we are developing for 23 sectors, accounting for 80% of our GDP.

6. Technology – like robotics, 3-D printing, data analytics and artificial intelligence – is eliminating or changing traditional jobs, but also creating new jobs – in the same industry or in entirely new ones. Even amidst the uncertainties we face, our economy continues to generate ample and good job opportunities. But these jobs require new skills and capabilities. Our challenge is to ensure that Singaporeans, especially those already in the workforce, are willing to learn and acquire skills that are necessary to meet the changing needs of their current industry, or convert to jobs in a new or different industry. The basic issue is not an insufficiency of jobs but a mismatch of skills.

SkillsFuture

7. This is where SkillsFuture comes in – it is a national movement that aims to foster a culture of lifelong learning and the acquisition of deep skills. Hence, government agencies like Workforce Singapore (WSG) and SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) have launched a host of programmes to help Singaporeans earn as they learn, upgrade their skills through modular programmes, or even convert to a new profession.

8. To succeed, the SkillsFuture movement cannot just be a Government initiative. We need all stakeholders – industry associations and employers, unions and workers, government agencies and educational institutions – to take ownership, collaborate and build a comprehensive eco-system for the continuous development of skills.

9. Earlier, Mr Soh Wai Wah shared that SP and PACE Academy have aligned their efforts to the SkillsFuture movement, and positioned themselves as a “Polytechnic for All Ages”. I welcome and commend this initiative which recognises the critical enabling role that our educational institutions play in the lifelong learning journey of Singaporeans.

10. In particular, we need a close nexus between educational institutions like SP PACE Academy and industry, to ensure that the knowledge acquired and skills developed are relevant to the changing needs of the industry.

11. I am therefore pleased that SP PACE Academy has worked closely with industry stakeholders to design and implement its courses. For example, the Specialist Diploma in Port Management and Operations, which is supported by SkillsFuture Singapore under the Earn and Learn Programme (or ELP), was designed in close collaboration with the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, PSA Corporation Ltd, and Jurong Port Pte Ltd. This ensures that the curriculum is validated

by the industry. Today, we are proud to witness the graduation of the first batch of trainees who received their Specialist Diplomas under the ELP.

12. SP has also collaborated with the growing Biologics and Pharmaceutical manufacturing industry to launch two capability building programmes. The Development and Apprenticeship (or DNA) programmes for the biologics and pharmaceutical industries commenced in July 2016 – the first-of-its-kind Professional Conversion Programme for the sector. Under the DNA programmes, new hires will undergo 18 months of On-the-Job Training while studying Workforce Skills Qualification modules on safety and good manufacturing practices. Trainees in these programmes are supported by Workforce Singapore and SkillsFuture Singapore with 70-90% course fee subsidies, monthly salary support during the training period, as well as structured real-world training with private employers. Currently, there are 7 companies on board the programme, including MSD and Novartis.

13. SP also launched the Local Biologics Skills Training (or BOOST) programme, targeted at those who are new to the sector, such as PMETs displaced from other industries or those seeking a mid-career switch. The local BOOST programme provides opportunities for participants to undergo real-world training in leading biologics companies such as Shire, Roche and AbbVie.

14. These are just some examples of how SP PACE Academy has worked with Workforce Singapore, SkillsFuture Singapore and the industry to promote the development of a skilled and future-ready workforce. We need more of such collaborations as our economy, companies and workers navigate an uncertain future.

Forging our own futures

15. Even as our institutions evolve and adapt to the changing needs of the economy, what ultimately drives success is the determination of each individual to take ownership for learning and to forge his/her own future. You, the SP PACE Academy graduands gathered here today, exemplify this. You have seized the initiative, and pursued opportunities to upgrade yourself, despite the challenges that I know many of you have had to face in having to meet the daily demands of a job, while also fulfilling family commitments. Kudos to all of you!

16. One of our graduands is Ms Tan Yan Jun, receiving her WSQ Higher Certificate in Process Technology (Biologics Manufacturing) under the local BOOST programme. Yan Jun previously worked as a laboratory technician in a junior college, preparing equipment for science experiments. Wanting a change in environment and broader career prospects, Yan Jun sought jobs in the pharmaceutical industry, but realised that she did not have the requisite skills and knowledge. Undeterred, she enrolled in a PCP to learn various manufacturing practices, as well as methods to troubleshoot and conduct tests on drug samples. Yan Jun is now a trainee at Roche, one of the

world's largest biotech companies, and will soon undergo hands-on training with the company.

17. Ms Felicia Kang took the road less travelled. She interrupted her junior college studies to pursue her passion and be an entrepreneur. Later, while she was enrolled in the Diploma in Business Management course at SP PACE Academy, Ricoh Singapore Pte Ltd – one of the world's leading suppliers of office automation equipment – took a keen interest in this determined lady, and offered her a new position as a Business Excellence Executive in the Managing Director's Office – even before she graduated! It was not easy for Felicia to juggle studies, work and family commitments. Nonetheless, with the support of her family, lecturers and course mates, Felicia graduates today at the top of her course.

18. I also want to acknowledge SP's Institutional Medallists, who are here with us today. Mr Muhammad Alfiz Bin Kambali is the recipient of the Tay Eng Soon Gold Medal for being the most outstanding graduate formerly from an Institute of Technical Education. Alfiz went astray in his teenage years and was not interested in school. After completing his GCE O-Levels, he took a two-year break to work. It was then that he discovered his interest in events management, and decided to enrol in the Higher Nitec course in Event Management at ITE College Central. Alfiz graduated with a perfect GPA, and subsequently enrolled in SP's Diploma in Integrated Events and Project Management course at the age of 25. He has done very well in his course, and was actively involved in events such as the SP Open House and the Freshman Orientation Programme. Alfiz also volunteered with the Care Singapore YouthCare Centre, where he helped counsel and support at-risk youths. Alfiz's perseverance and go-getter attitude show that age is no barrier to learning. Despite offers from local universities, he now plans to work in an events management company to gain more hands-on experience, before pursuing further studies.

19. The external environment may compel us to change and adapt, but it is our inner motivation and resolve that will help us overcome obstacles and forge our own futures. Lifelong learning can be an immensely rewarding experience, and I hope the stories of Yan Jun, Felicia, Alfiz, and many more like them, will inspire each and every one of us to keep pursuing opportunities to deepen our knowledge and upgrade our skills.

Conclusion

20. Today, you embark on the next phase of your life journey. I am confident that you have the drive, resilience and capabilities to tackle the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. And you can be assured that the government will work with employers and our education institutions, like SP and PACE Academy, to stand by you and help you successfully navigate the future economy.

21. Once again, let me congratulate all of you on your achievements. I wish you every happiness and success in your future endeavours.

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