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**SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION),
AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR THE 'BEST' AND 'WISE'
PROGRAMMES HELD AT THE NPB AUDITORIUM
ON SATURDAY, 21 MAY 1988 AT 3.00 PM**

It gives me great pleasure to officiate at this first Joint Graduation Ceremony for the BEST and WISE programmes.

We will today be awarding certificates to the very first students of the WISE Programme.

This marks another milestone in our efforts to raise the educational level of our workforce. Through the BEST and WISE programmes, a worker with no primary or secondary education can take systematic steps, module by module, to raise his education in English Language and Mathematics up to the GCE 'N' level.

The many graduates here today and at the five previous BEST graduation ceremonies have clearly demonstrated that the BEST and WISE programmes can work for them.

For Singapore to venture into new products, adapt to new advances in technology and remain competitive, we need a workforce that is progressively better educated.

The Best Programme 1983

For this reason, the Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST) programme was first launched, as a national project, in January 1983. It is a worker education programme specially designed for those who do not have a primary education.

The BEST Programme is targetted to reach some 225,000 workers. At this point in time, five years hence, 106,000 persons have already enrolled in one or more modules, representing 47 per cent of the target. The number who have successfully completed Module 4 (the highest module) in English and/or Mathematics is 19,430.

Of the 19,430 workers who have completed Module 4, 4,040 have proceeded on to skills training or further education. These results tell us that the BEST programme has been effective in motivating our workers towards higher education and skills upgrading. The interest in BEST continues to be strong at each intake, with each intake averaging about 19,000 participants.

The WISE Programme 1987

By 1986, the stage was set for the launching of a second worker education programme, namely, the Worker Improvement through Secondary Education or WISE programme. The need for such a secondary education programme was highlighted by the Economic Committee Report which found that 53 per cent of our workforce had at most primary level education. The Committee recommended that the median educational level of the Singapore workforce should be raised to the GCE 'N' level.

In response to the Economic Committee's call, the WISE programme was launched in September 1987 on a pilot basis.

WISE is patterned along the successful BEST model. The programme is designed in four modules over two years, to prepare workers for the GCE 'N' in English Language and Mathematics. Each module, of between 100 and 120 hours, can be completed by workers attending classes twice a week for 20 weeks on a part-time basis. The classes are held conveniently at the company's premises before or after a shift and also at the PAP Education Centres at the constituencies.

The initial target group for WISE is about 112,000.

Progress in WISE Programme

The two pilot intakes in September 1987 and March 1988 have been overwhelmingly successful. As against a planned intake of 7,700, for the two intakes, 11,110 places were taken up. This was 44 per cent above target. It reflects a most encouraging response from workers for secondary education. Of special significance is the fact that some 2,800 or 33 per cent of the participants in the two pilot intakes are BEST Module 4 graduates.

Of the 1,023 from the first intake (September 1987) who took the end of course examinations in February 1988, 96 per cent passed. This has confirmed that the learning objectives set for the WISE programme can be achieved.

The support and involvement of the employers, and NTUC/PAP and Ministry of Defence Centres have been crucial. A total of 90 companies have participated in the pilot phase. They enrolled 40 per cent of the intakes, while NTUC/PAP centres enrolled 17 per cent. The rest were in VITB and Mindef centres.

With these results, our conclusion is that the pilot testing of the WISE programme has been highly successful. We can confidently move to the full implementation of WISE, with the target of enrolling 14,000 a year. Only the first two Modules were offered in September 1987 and Module 3 was added in March 1988. All four Modules in the WISE programme will be available in the September 1988 intake.

Special Awards

Last year, the Basic Education Advisory Council implemented a scheme of special awards for companies and NTUC/PAP centres.

I am pleased to announce that this year, the Council has selected five companies and three NTUC/PAP centres for their outstanding contributions to and support of the BEST programme. These companies and centres have been selected for the number of classes they have conducted and the special incentives and recognition given to sustain the interests of workers in the BEST programme.

The winners of this year's special awards are:

GM Singapore Pte Ltd

Matsushita Refrigeration Industries
(S) Pte Ltd

Port of Singapore Authority

Singapore Airport Terminal Services (Pte) Ltd

Wingmei Outer-Wear Co Pte Ltd

Boon Lay PAP Education Centre

Teck Ghee PAP Education Centre

Yishun PAP Education Centre

I would like to conclude by congratulating the companies and centres that have won awards this year. My congratulations also go to the prize winners of the BEST and WISE programmes as well as the Singapore Labour Foundation Award winners. You have done well and I encourage you to continue to upgrade your education and skills.

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