

Senior Minister of State for Education Indranee Rajah says the Government is adapting parts of Germany's dual education model where students learn not only in schools, but in companies.

DRESDEN: In Singapore's push to enhance training pathways for all, sectors where there is a need for skilled manpower will be given priority. According to Senior Minister of State for Education Indranee Rajah, that is because the Government wants to meet areas where there is demand, so that there will be good prospects for Singaporeans.

Ms Indranee was speaking to Channel NewsAsia during a recent working visit to Germany with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.



ITE students learning on the job at a cafe. (Photo: Loke Kok Fai)

THE GERMAN APPROACH

Germany has a dual education model which is highly regarded and modelled after in several countries. Essentially, students in vocational training not only learn in schools, but also in companies. This "hands-on" experience makes them well-attuned to industry needs.

Singapore is exploring the German approach. At the Gustav Anton Zeuner vocational school in Dresden, PM Lee and Ms Indranee had observed first-hand how the system works.

The school focuses on technical professions, providing training in automotive engineering and industrial metal technology. Under Germany's vocational education system, the school works closely with companies to keep training for pupils up-to-date.

In Singapore, vocational education is carried out largely in the classroom, with internships given for industry exposure. Efforts are being made to put in place a more structured approach to give students this type of exposure, similar to what Germany has done.

While Singapore is not porting over the German system wholesale, Ms Indranee said aspects of it are being adapted.

She said: "If you take a step back and you look at what they are actually doing, that is transportable. What they are doing is ... they are asking, what does industry need? Let me work closely with the industry. Let me develop my curriculum and the things that I teach and I learn to what is needed, because that way, you will be able to get a job where you can be sure it is a good-paying job and you can also be sure that there is a career ahead of you."

This is also what Singapore's SkillsFuture Council is looking at. More details of the council's initiatives to help Singaporeans develop job-relevant skills and improve career prospects are set to be unveiled in Budget 2015.

Ms Indranee said it will take several years, however, for Singapore's push to enhance training pathways to reach a steady state. Efforts will initially be geared towards sectors like aviation and aerospace, preschool, engineering, construction and infocomm, where there is demand for skilled workers.

She noted: "The most important takeaway people should have from this is that it is all about mastering your particular area of work. It could be technical, it could be in the services, it could be professional, it does not really matter, but the important thing is that you must have practical skills that are relevant to your career choice and that no matter what career choice it is, you must have the opportunity to progress, to climb, to advance."

STARTING MENTORSHIP AS EARLY AS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Meanwhile, with regard to career choices, the Human Capital Leadership Institute has suggested that mentorship can start as early as in primary school.

Mr Kwan Chee Wei, chief executive of the Human Capital Leadership Institute, said: "If you look at the Swiss system, they start at age 12. So for us as a small country, if your intervention comes in past 'O' Levels - 16, 17 and 18, a lot of things are already ingrained. So ... what I would like to see is it starts as young as 12 or perhaps that there are definitely career track options available beyond the traditional route."

A handful of Singapore's educational institutes are already helping students onto certain career paths by partnering German companies. These include the Singapore Institute of Technology, which is working with German firms to pioneer a dual education programme for students.