

GOAL IS TO PREVENT PAPER CHASE FOR ITS OWN SAKE

Need to align wide range of qualifications: Ye Kung

SINGAPORE – The increasing array of higher education credentials — ranging from qualifications from vocational institutions, to university degrees and industry certification — must be aligned to “speak the same language” so that the vision of learning being lifelong, and progressive can be achieved, said Acting Education Minister (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung.

This includes ensuring that the quality is up to mark, that the qualifications are compatible with market needs, that they can be linked to lead to higher qualifications, and that the industry recognises these qualifications. Speaking at the OECD-Singapore conference on Higher Education Futures, Mr Ong noted that beyond

traditional academic qualifications, there is a “burgeoning market” for alternative qualifications, which are becoming credentials in their own right.

These qualification systems — which could range from polytechnic diplomas to Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications offered by private players — must have “inter-operability”.

“They must speak the same language and use similar source codes. It is imperative that we achieve this, because this will bring about a significant step towards making learning modular, flexible, progressive and lifelong,” said Mr Ong.

He also stressed that academic credentials will continue to have its place

“**What we do want to prevent is paper chase for its own sake, and an overemphasis on one particular type of paper qualification.**

Mr Ong Ye Kung
ACTING EDUCATION
MINISTER (HIGHER
EDUCATION AND SKILLS)

and there is “nothing wrong” with paper qualifications, as they help industries and employers understand an employee’s proficiency and knowledge levels. “What we do want to prevent is paper chase for its own sake, and an overemphasis on one particular type of paper qualification,” he said.

“If we succeed in our effort, we will have a better balance between knowledge and skills pursuits, between academic and competency accomplishments, and across a wide spectrum of disciplines that is more reflective of the needs of the economy and personal aspirations,” he added.

Addressing the 500-strong audience comprising academics and university administrators, Mr Ong spoke on the SkillsFuture initiative, which aims to cater to growing societal aspirations for higher education.

Singapore is increasing the university cohort participation rate to 40 per cent by 2020 — an eightfold increase from 1980. But it is about adding new programmes and institutions, and not just university places. “It is not a cook-

ie cutter but a full range — square pegs, round pegs, all types of fantastical shapes,” he said.

There will be new possibilities as to what students can learn, with the introduction of applied learning universities — SIM University and the Singapore Institute of Technology. Learning too will shift to become lifelong, where lines between pre-employment training and continuing education and training will be blurred. The Internet and workplaces will be official platforms for learning, he added.

“Diversity will not merely be in terms of course choices, but will be multi-dimensional. It means rethinking what we learn, when we learn, where and how we learn, and the kind of credentials we achieve at the end of the training, and how society recognises... those credentials.” **NG JING YNG**



COMMENT & ANALYSIS
A WORTHY JOURNEY
TO RETHINK HOW,
WHAT, WHERE
AND WHEN WE LEARN 16