

Looking forward: Happenings at home



The final five of the Ministry of Education's 15 kindergartens will open this year. The pre-schools are meant to pilot innovative teaching methods and share them with the pre-school sector. ST FILE PHOTO

Education

More choices, more opportunities for learning

The new year brings SkillsFuture credit, added uni places, and more kindergartens

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The new year will present Singaporeans with more choices and learning opportunities – from kindergarten to university education and beyond, and whether they want to hone their work skills or delve into research.

SKILLSFUTURE

This month, all Singaporeans aged 25 and above will receive a letter on how to activate their SkillsFuture Credit accounts. It will include a step-by-step guide on how to use their initial \$500 worth of credit.

There is no cut-off date for when the money has to be used by, and there will be periodic top-ups, so people can save up to pay for more expensive courses. It can also be used on top of other government subsidies. More than \$1 billion has been set aside by the Government to fund this scheme in a bid to encourage Singaporeans to continue learning through their lives.

The scheme was announced in the Budget speech delivered last February by Deputy Prime Minister and Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

The credits can be used for approved courses in several areas, from aerospace to sports to health-care. Singaporeans are free to opt for any course.

So far, the directory of courses launched by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA)

already lists 10,000 courses – from financial literacy to photography and cooking.

They are offered by more than 500 providers, such as the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore Institute of Management and Nanyang Technological University.

Another SkillsFuture initiative, the Earn and Learn work-study programme, is likely to be expanded this year. WDA said the scheme, in which Institute of Technical Education and polytechnic graduates further their qualifications while working, is “on track”, with about 150 trainees across eight industries, such as logistics and food manufacturing.

More industries are expected to be included this year.

MORE UNI PLACES AND DEGREES

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), a key avenue for polytechnic graduates to earn a degree, has announced that it will launch six new courses and raise its intake by another 300 places this year, bringing the total to 2,400.

Five of the new degrees are in

health-related fields: nursing, occupational therapy, radiation therapy, diagnostic radiography and physiotherapy, which SIT will run with Trinity College Dublin.

The sixth new degree will be in intelligent transportation systems engineering – a combination of electrical engineering, computer science and learning about intelligent transportation systems such as those used in driverless cars.

The health courses, aside from nursing, will take in 235 students with either A-level qualifications or relevant diplomas in areas such as biomedical sciences.

The new degrees are in areas where there is a huge demand for specialists, given Singapore's rapidly ageing population. This has also led to higher demand for specialists in another area – social work.

To address this, SIM University (UniSIM) will offer a Bachelor of Social Work degree from this year.

Like other UniSIM degree courses, this one will also focus on hands-on, practice-based learning. Students in the four-year direct honours programme must complete

and pass 1,000 hours of supervised social work in volunteer welfare organisations in order to graduate.

FIVE MORE MOE KINDERGARTENS

The final five of the Ministry of Education's 15 kindergartens – first announced in 2013 – will open this year in Sembawang Drive, Woodlands Crescent, Jurong West, Fernvale Link and Anchorvale Link.

These pre-schools, the only ones run by the Government – and mostly situated within primary schools, with three at void decks – are meant to pilot innovative teaching methods, and share them with the pre-school sector.

When the children move on to Primary 1, they will continue to be tracked to see how they develop, and if teaching methods used in the MOE pre-schools should be expanded to other schools.

The pupils will also be part of an ongoing National Institute of Education study of children's development as they progress from kindergarten to primary school.

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The year ahead

- Credits for courses
- More university places and degrees
- More MOE kindergartens