Aviation sector gets $120m more to boost productivity, innovation

Funds come on top of $160m pledged earlier by CAAS to support initiatives to spur growth

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To accelerate plans to make Singapore's aviation industry more efficient and innovative, another $120 million will be set aside to support various initiatives.

The funding is on top of $160 million that the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) had earlier pledged when it renewed the Aviation Development Fund for five years until March 31, 2020.

Announcing the top-up at an annual aviation gathering yesterday, Senior Minister of State for Transport Janil Puthucheary said this would further support investments in productivity-boosting initiatives.

At the event, CAAS director-general Kevin Shum said the aviation sector has done well, with a 5.7 per cent year-on-year jump in productivity last year and more than 30 new innovation projects launched.

"But we need to move even faster to capture opportunities from growth," he said in his speech.

"Growth at Changi Airport has been robust in recent years. We are approaching capacity. At the same time, it is harder to hire more workers as our population continues to age," he added.

Among other initiatives being planned, CAAS is looking to support firms with good ideas on how to automate labour-intensive processes in airport operations.

In particular, the hunt is for solutions for more effective tarmac operations, including how to increase flight-handling capacity.

Another area of focus is drones, with the authority looking to support projects to enable the development of the fast-growing unmanned aircraft systems sector to benefit Singapore.

Four proposals have been selected to explore solutions in areas such as surveillance, inspection, package and maritime delivery, and the effective and safe use of airspace for unmanned aircraft systems.

The local aviation industry is also pushing for better training for aviation workers as well as infrastructure projects to support future growth in the air travel sector.

The overall objective is to enhance Singapore's competitiveness as an air hub.

In December, a new passenger terminal will open at Seletar Airport to replace an existing pre-World War II facility.

The $80 million terminal – six times larger than the current one – will be able to handle up to 700,000 passengers a year.

On training, CAAS said that this year, 33 aviation professionals were awarded the SkillsFuture Study Award for Air Transport. Since 2016, more than 80 professionals have benefited from the scheme.

As part of a national initiative, the aviation industry has also launched the Skills Framework to provide workers with key information on the sector and employment opportunities, as well as career pathways and emerging skills and competencies required.

The framework was developed by SkillsFuture Singapore, Workforce Singapore and CAAS, together with employers, industry associations, unions and educational and training institutions.

Aviation companies have also pledged to invest in training for their staff.

For example, ground-handling firm Sats will be launching its Sats Academy, which will align its programmes with the Skills Framework for Air Transport, to allow employees to receive nationally recognised certification.

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) has also developed a Bachelor of Science in Air Transport Management – the first Ministry of Education-recognised degree programme for air transport.

SIT plans to take in 50 students for the first intake, with classes set to begin next year.

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