

Fees and bursaries for part-time tertiary students to be reviewed

Education system's biggest challenge is to be effective for continual learning, says PM Lee

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Fees and bursaries for part-time students will be reviewed, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday, adding to his announcement at last month's National Day Rally that tertiary education will be more affordable.

And if necessary, these fees and bursaries will be adjusted, he said in a speech at the Singapore University of Social Sciences' (SUSS) inaugural ministerial dialogue.

He noted the Government has not

yet revised the fees and bursaries for part-time students, although it had done so for full-time students through higher bursaries for lower- and middle-income university students, and lower fees for general degree programmes at SUSS and the Singapore Institute of Technology.

"We looked at them, but we think that these fees and bursaries should be affordable for working adults," he said, adding that the Government will review the situation and make changes where needed.

The value of lifelong learning and a university education as well as the future of work amid technological

disruption were among the issues covered during a lively one-hour dialogue between PM Lee and about 500 SUSS students.

SUSS, which became Singapore's sixth autonomous university in 2017, offers full-time and part-time graduate and undergraduate courses.

PM Lee said the biggest challenge for Singapore's education system is to make it effective for continual learning.

He explained that it is not just a matter of money or about running courses, but having educational programmes that are suited to meet the learning needs and styles of adults – whether they are from Generation X or in their 70s.

Courses offered in polytechnics and universities have to be struc-

tured in a modular fashion, and lecturers have to adapt their teaching styles to help older people learn at their own pace, PM Lee noted.

A whole support system must also be in place so employers understand and make adjustments when their workers go for courses, and employees can focus on their jobs and studies and maintain a balance, he added.

"We will do it, we have got SkillsFuture SG. But we are still early on in the journey," he noted.

During the dialogue, PM Lee was asked how Singapore graduates fared against those from around the region, who may be more hungry and willing to work for lower pay.

"I think that we have to be hungry, too. Because if we are not hungry, somebody will steal our

lunch," he said.

"It is a competition which we manage in Singapore because the inflow of talent, the inflow of people from other countries to Singapore, we manage, we track carefully their numbers, their standards, their proportions, to make sure they don't crowd Singaporeans out and Singaporeans have opportunities for the jobs."

But if Singaporeans are not up to scratch, companies will go around the region to look for talent, he noted.

Still, he believes Singapore has a workforce which is good, collective and productive – factors which have attracted firms like Finnish oil company Neste to invest here.

But there are not enough Singaporeans, due to the low fer-

tility rate, and fewer are entering the workforce.

"And so, if we don't top ourselves up with talent from overseas... I don't think we will be able to take up all the opportunities which are available to us," he said.

"We open the door, they come, they complement us, we have to work hard. Yes. But we work hard, we hold our own."

One participant at the dialogue asked for advice on his employability as he felt there was a perception that the other universities were better than SUSS.

Responding, PM Lee said that to level the playing field, SUSS must maintain high standards and its graduates must fly the university flag high.

Each time Singapore added a new university, a niche was found for the institution, he said.

SUSS, which focuses on social sciences, gives students skills – conceptually and practically – to tackle important social issues, he added.

"If you can excel in that area, whether you graduate as a lawyer or (from) business, or in social work, or in sociology, or in communications, I think you establish yourself as a (graduate of a) first-class institution," said PM Lee.

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Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong taking a photo with participants of the Singapore University of Social Sciences' inaugural ministerial dialogue. Among the issues covered during the dialogue were the value of lifelong learning and a university education, as well as the future of work amid technological disruption. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Big problem if S'pore doesn't think ahead on climate change: PM

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After Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that the Government will spend an estimated \$100 billion in the long term to protect Singapore from rising sea levels, some people asked him: Why not take those funds to help the needy now?

"But if we don't pay attention to 50, 100 years from now, I think you are going to have a big problem before 50 and 100 years come," PM Lee said yesterday at a forum with Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) students.

Climate change is something that will happen in Singaporeans' and their children's lifetimes, and the Government's approach is to look ahead and prepare for such future challenges, even while tackling short-term priorities, he noted.

In his National Day Rally last month, PM Lee had set out the threat of climate change and measures to mitigate its effects.

Speaking at the SUSS' inaugural ministerial forum, he said responses to his National Day Rally showed that climate change resonated more with young Singaporeans because they saw the urgency of the problem and wanted to do something about it. Older Singaporeans focused more on immediate issues like the economy.

A student asked whether Singapore's spending on climate change



Roads like Nicoll Drive were raised to reduce the impact of flooding as sea levels rise. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has said around \$100 billion may be needed to protect Singapore against rising sea levels. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

mitigation was futile, in the light of the United States pulling out of the Paris Agreement, a global climate change pact agreed to by nearly 200 countries. PM Lee replied: "We can't force other countries to do what we think we would like them to do. All we can do is our share."

But if other countries still do not do their part, then Singapore has to protect itself, he said. "And if need be, more than (\$100 billion), in or-

der to make sure that if the sea levels rise, Singapore does not become a smaller island, which otherwise is very much on the cards."

He also contrasted Singapore's long-term approach with the immediate political and resource pressures facing governments around the world, from population growth to agricultural land and coal mining.

"I don't think those are pressures which governments can easily ig-

nore because if you ignore, then somebody else will turn up... the government which wants to be green is kicked out.

"All we can do is to say, let's work at this together. There is a Paris accord, it is a first step. It is not enough, but it is a step in the right direction... If we don't do our part, we are not good global citizens."

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ADVICE TO A STUDENT WHO COULD BE A FUTURE PRIME MINISTER

A her? I hope it is a her. I would say, work with your colleagues, your classmates, work hard at your studies and your career.

But not just that, take an interest in the society around you. Take an interest in the world around you.

Read the newspapers. Do you know what has just happened in England today? Something big happened in England because Boris Johnson is trying to make a no-deal Brexit if necessary by Oct 31. And Parliament said, I am going to control the Order Paper tomorrow, I am going to pass a Bill to prevent you from doing that. The MPs in Parliament voted against him, including... MPs from his own Conservative Party.

So, you don't have to be an expert in Brexit or England, but you must have an interest in the world. And you must understand how we fit in.

And if you do well, not just in your career, but also participating in our wider society, I think there are many things to do, and you don't have to wait to be invited to drink tea.

You should go out, not with a view to be noticed, but with a view to make a contribution so that you can live your life meaningfully, purposefully. And I think you can make Singapore a much better place to live in.



PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG, on what advice he would give to Singapore's sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth-generation prime minister, if she were seated in the audience.