

Pre-school work experience to count towards degree

In tie-up with SUSS, NTUC First Campus teachers can skip certain modules

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The work experience of teachers from one of Singapore's largest pre-school operators will now count towards getting a degree.

This will help them be trained in a shorter time for a sector which many have said is critical in giving children a head start in life.

Under a new arrangement to start next year, the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) will recognise the work and teaching experience of selected pre-school teachers from NTUC First Campus and exempt them from certain modules – subject to its admissions interview.

This means they can be granted up to 20 credit units – equivalent to up to four courses – and graduate six months earlier. Students usually take about four to five years to complete their undergraduate studies.

Mr Chan Tee Seng, NTUC First Campus' chief executive, said yesterday that it is the first pre-school operator in Singapore to partner an institute of higher learning to offer credit recognition for teachers in part-time early childhood care and education degrees.

From next year, the pre-school operator will set aside \$1 million annually for the next five years to fund study awards and scholarships for eligible teachers.

They will be selected based on their work experience and potential to hold higher leadership positions, such as lead teacher or deputy centre leader.



Attendees of the Learning and Sharing Festival learning how to grow plants in a plastic bottle. The tie-up between NTUC First Campus and the Singapore University of Social Sciences was announced at the festival. ST PHOTO: SYAZA NISRINA

Mr Chan said: "Many of our colleagues want to pursue a degree. They value the degree programme not just for the status that it confers, but also the opportunity to learn, to broaden and deepen their perspectives so that they can be better teachers and leaders."

He was speaking at the Learning and Sharing Festival for NTUC First Campus teachers to share teaching practices.

Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, the guest of honour at the event, commended the initiative as ground-breaking, in bringing university studies closer to industry – the pre-school sector in this case.

"Early childhood is a more and more important issue because we realise over the years that the more

you can prepare young children early, the better they can do in life, particularly in this era when we see more inequality," he said.

The initiative comes amid efforts to upgrade the early childhood profession and attract and retain pre-school teachers in the sector, which has been expanding to meet demand from young families.

NTUC First Campus, which has 140 My First Skool pre-schools, is the second largest pre-school operator here, after the PAP Community Foundation.

Yesterday's festival, which was held at the Singapore Expo, brought together more than 3,500 teachers.

One of them, Ms Andrea Judy Wong, is in her second year of part-

time early childhood education studies at SUSS. The 24-year-old, who is acting deputy centre lead at a My First Skool centre in Ang Mo Kio, said: "If I could get exempted from some modules, it would take off some pressure and allow me to complete the course at a comfortable pace."

Ms Wong, who is engaged and plans to get married at the end of 2020, said her wedding could be brought forward if she finishes her studies earlier.

"I postponed my wedding because of my studies – I felt it would be too tough to have work commitments, study commitments and also plan for a wedding."