

S'pore to develop a culture of learning

Country can be at the forefront of lifelong learning: DPM Tharman

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Many countries are on a journey to help their citizens develop a culture of lifelong learning, but none have emerged as leaders in this field.

Singapore can be at the forefront of this endeavour with its SkillsFuture movement, said Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam yesterday.

And the recent teaming up of the Institute for Adult Learning (IAL) and Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) will make a “powerful vanguard” in the Republic’s journey, Mr Tharman said at the university’s 14th anniversary celebration, held at its campus in Clementi Road.

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Singapore is still at an early stage of the SkillsFuture journey, he stressed, and like other countries, has a lot to learn from each other.

But he expressed confidence that the merger will provide a boost.

Since April 1, the IAL has been restructured as an autonomous institute in SUSS, and both will work to advance the field of adult learning, through research and developing new courses for adult educators, among other plans.

SkillsFuture is quite simply Singapore’s “most important economic and social strategy in the long term”, said Mr Tharman.

On the economic front, Singapore is only as competitive as the skills it has, he said, adding that there must be a continuous deepening of skills and picking up of

new ones throughout a worker’s career.

On the social side, Singapore is trying to create a meritocracy of skills, rather than grades earned early in life, as a new form of social mobility.

Singapore also wants to develop a new social culture, where people get satisfaction in life from learning at every stage regardless of where they start, satisfaction from mastering skills, and satisfaction from being part of a community of learners, he added.

“Internationally, there is no real leader in this endeavour. Different countries are adopting different approaches, we are learning from each other,” said the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies.

He gave the example of Denmark, which since 2017, has built into the collective agreements between employers and trade unions the obligation for employers to design and invest in training for their workers and give them time off.

Canada recently introduced a training benefit and it did so after studying different approaches, including Singapore’s SkillsFuture initiative.

Turning to the strengths of SUSS, Mr Tharman noted it offers flexibility in course structures, and in creating clusters of modules that meet the needs of industry, as well as having lecturers from the industry come in to teach courses.

It is also on the “cutting edge” by recognising learning at the workplace and accrediting it, he added.

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