



Singapore education, training sectors must adapt to keep global edge: Chan

More than 1,900 jobs available in early childhood sector; 8 in 10 for PMETs

Singapore
THE education sector in Singapore may be well-regarded, but it must continue to keep pace in the global market, Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing said on Monday.

Speaking to the media after a virtual visit to a class at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development, he said there are "tremendous opportunities" to relook how training and education is conducted in the industry and beyond Singapore.

He mapped out four broad changes in the education sector, which he said must evolve to remain competitive.

The first change is that learning cannot be limited to the initial 15 to 20 years of a person's life anymore, said Mr Chan.

"It is no longer about just compulsory education, but it is about continuing education," he said, adding that Singapore has to find new ways of educating adult learners, which will be an increasingly important sector for the country.

Mr Chan said the second trend that Covid-19 has hastened is how learning is now not just offline, but also online.

"There are both benefits of online and offline teaching methods. The challenge for us is to make sure that we combine both methods and get the best outcome for our students," he added.

Thirdly, schools and companies must increasingly work together, as learning must not only happen in the confines of schools and institutes of higher learning.

"Today you will find that many more of our courses, especially adult learning courses, will have to combine classroom learning with on-the-job training with businesses," he said.

Many tech companies like Google and Facebook conduct training within their premises because "that's where the cutting edge technology and cutting edge transformation of business ideas are coming from", he added.

The last change is that it is no longer sufficient to have expertise in only one subject, said Mr Chan.

"Of course we have to go deep. But today we also have to equip our people with the adjacent competencies" so that job seekers will be more attractive for industry, he said.

"Many of our students will no longer just narrowly learn about accountancy, they will also deal with

business development. They may even deal with legal and financial aspects of the adjacent competencies."

Mr Chan said that many education and training institutions in Singapore beyond the formal school system have adapted to these changes.

"Many of them have also gone beyond Singapore, using the Singapore brand to be competitive in a very crowded, very congested international market," he said.

He noted that Singapore has the "necessary ingredients" to continue making its mark in education. These refer to the country's brand of quality and the trust that people have in its education and training system.

At the briefing on Monday, Manpower Minister Josephine Teo and Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli also shared about the job opportunities in the early childhood sector, as part of a weekly jobs situation report.

Mr Masagos said the sector is doing well and is still growing, in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis. About 180,000 children are enrolled today in pre-school and by 2023, this is expected to grow to 200,000.

The sector, which has a "very low" attrition rate, hires 21,000 pre-school

teachers, and is still recruiting, said Mr Masagos.

Because demand for our teachers continues to be healthy, salary increases have also been good, with about 17 per cent increase over the last three years," he said.

More than 1,900 jobs are on offer in the early childhood sector, with eight in 10 for professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs).

They make up the bulk - 98 per cent - of the 1,940 jobs, traineeship and attachment openings available as at the end of September, said the Manpower Ministry.

The 1,620 PMET jobs include pre-school teachers, centre leaders and childcare services managers. Another 290 jobs available are for non-PMET roles.

Apart from jobs, there are about 30 company-hosted traineeships and attachments available.

"The operators do want to bring people on board, not necessarily just on traineeships and attachments, because they are confident that they have vacancies to fill," said Mrs Teo.

Her ministry disclosed that more than 570 people were placed into jobs, traineeships and attachments



Pre-school enrolment is expected to rise, driving the sector's labour demand, says MOM. BT FILE PHOTO

positions in the sector between April and mid-October, through the help of Workforce Singapore and the National Trades Union Congress' Employment and Employability Institute. This is on top of direct recruitment by the operators themselves.

With more dual-income families and working grandparents as well as greater emphasis placed on the im-

portance of the early years for child development, pre-school enrolment is expected to rise, driving the sector's labour demand, said MOM.

Currently, there are about 21,000 certified educators in the early childhood sector here, up by over 30 per cent from 2016. Demand is expected to grow as pre-school places are set to rise to more than 200,000 by 2023.

THE STRAITS TIMES