

→ CHAPTER 2

EMBRACING LEARNING BEYOND GRADES



Education has been a key part of Singapore's remarkable transformation.

Of the generation born in the 1940s, nearly 60% did not complete secondary school. We have come a long way since then. Our education system is now widely respected in the world. Our students, including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, consistently outperform many of their peers in other countries.

All parents want the best for their children and to prepare them well for the future. Unfortunately, the emphasis on education has, over time, led to anxiety about exam scores and the pressure to get to the 'right' schools as a key to future success, social status and happiness.

We will have to do more to make our education system more flexible and reduce stress on students. Exams like the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) should not become a high-stakes checkpoint for students. Instead, students should be able to learn at their own pace, and the PSLE should remain just one of many checkpoints in the education system for students to gauge the extent of their learning.

We should focus on the more important aspects of our children's experiences in schools — the development of life skills, quality of our children's relationships and level of engagement in learning, be it the chance to work on a meaningful project or to participate actively in Co-Curricular Activities (CCAs).

Furthermore, learning cannot be crammed into our formal schooling years. It is not possible for the first 15 years of education to prepare us for changes over the next few decades of our careers and our lives. Learning must continue after we leave school.



If at an early age, [children] are already expected to fulfil or get good grades in preparation for PSLE, it's taxing for the kids and parents as well."

- Participant at Ministry of Education (MOE) Parent Support Group Engagement, 3 September 2022

Our approach to education must evolve to equip our students to navigate a world that will be very different in 20 to 30 years.

Students and learners of all ages, parents, communities and industry partners need to work hand in hand with the Government to do more in the following areas:

▶ **Give every child a good start**



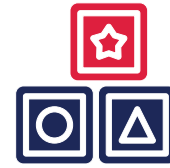
▶ **Provide more diverse pathways to develop every student to their full potential**



▶ **Beyond school, pursue lifelong learning**



Give Every Child a Good Start



Research is clear that both pre-natal and early childhood years are critical for a child's development. They set the foundation for future learning. There is strong evidence, both internationally and locally, on what works — supporting maternal health and well-being, providing a nurturing and stimulating environment, and building strong relationships.

A good start is not about academic preparation. Rather, it is about imbuing the right values and a love for learning in our children. The hope is for our next generation to be excited, and not apprehensive, about the lifetime of learning ahead. It is crucial that we work together to achieve this for our children.





The Government has increased its investments in preschool education considerably in the last decade.

We will press on with our plans to provide 80% of our children with places in a government-supported preschool offered by Anchor Operators and Partner Operators, as well as MOE Kindergartens, by around 2025. These government-supported centres will uphold high standards and keep their fees affordable. We are also doing more to uplift the preschool profession, to attract, develop and retain good teachers in these centres.



We ask that parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and any adult who cares for our children continue to play a part in building our children's life skills, and nurture a sense of curiosity.

This is the best time for all children to learn through play and develop a love for learning.



We will pay special attention to children from lower-income families.

There is now near universal enrolment in preschool, especially at ages five and six. However, we have found that the enrolment and attendance at preschool for children from lower-income families at ages three to four years tend to be lower than the national average. We will therefore focus on uplifting young children from more disadvantaged backgrounds by spurring their enrolment and attendance in preschool, to close early developmental gaps. We will elaborate on these plans in Chapter 6.

Together, we can ensure that every child, regardless of family background, can have a strong start in life.





More Diverse Pathways to Develop Every Student to Their Full Potential



Over the last 50 years, we have significantly improved the quality of our education system to meet the needs of our economy and society, and the aspirations and aptitudes of our students.

We can do more. The Government will introduce more customisation in our education system to better support every student in fulfilling their diverse potential:



We will abolish streaming and move to Full Subject-Based Banding to cater to the diverse learning needs, interests and abilities of our students in different subjects, instead of their overall academic abilities.

From 2024, there will no longer be 'Normal' and 'Express' streams. In time, a new generation will not remember these labels, or use them to categorise themselves and others. Instead, there will be greater porosity and social mixing, for students to better appreciate each other's diverse strengths and talents.



We are exploring how adaptive learning technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deep analytics technologies can enable us to further tailor curricula to individual students' needs.

This will allow us to offer more customisation in teaching and learning.





We are deepening support for students with Special Educational Needs in both mainstream and Special Education (SPED) schools, as well as our Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs).

We have been providing more resourcing and staff training in our mainstream schools and IHLs, and will also strengthen the professional development of educators in SPED schools. We will elaborate more on how we, as a society, can better support persons with disabilities (PwDs) and their families in Chapters 4 and 6.



We are also broadening the definition of merit.

For example, the Direct School Admission (DSA) promotes holistic education and provides students with opportunities to demonstrate a wider range of talents when seeking admission to secondary schools. Currently about 10% of students are admitted to secondary schools through the DSA. We envisage more to go through the DSA avenue as we give more emphasis to holistic education. In particular, we will continue strengthening support for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds in the DSA process.

But schools alone will not be able to cater to every aspiration, nor prepare our students fully for every industry.



We will develop more partnerships between schools to give students access to a wider range of opportunities.

For a start, schools can partner each other for CCAs, Values-in-Action programmes, and other holistic development programmes. Schools located near each other can also work together as a cluster to set up partnerships.



The first few hockey sessions were awkward even though the coaches were trying their best to unite us. However, after spending seven months together, we've fostered bonds by training together, overcoming disagreements and conflicts together as we have formed friendships. During the National School Games, we were all supportive of each other, encouraging one another to push harder each time the opponent scored a goal. This is why I'm proud to be part of this partnership between Queensway Secondary School and Singapore Chinese Girls' School, and why I call this my team."

- Bethany Mary Piper (Secondary 1, Singapore Chinese Girls' School), Member of Hockey (Girls) CCA team comprising students from Queensway Secondary School and Singapore Chinese Girls' School.



Community partners can work with MOE's recently established Partnerships Engagement Office to develop links with suitable schools and offer areas of excellence and programmes in niche areas.



Industry players can come together with academia to co-design, co-develop and co-deliver education modules for both students and adult learners.

This will equip our students with the latest industry knowledge and practices, so they have the relevant skills when they enter the workforce.



Talent development is a shared commitment between the education fraternity and the business community. As our economy evolves, schools and companies can benefit from working together, for example, in co-developing authentic exposures for educators and students, and helping students explore the range of future employment opportunities.

Singapore Business Federation (SBF) is happy to help connect businesses with schools to deepen partnerships and cross-pollinate new ideas."

- Mr Lam Yi Young, former Chief Executive Officer (2021-2022), SBF



Strengthening school-industry partnerships is an important strategy to ensure Singapore remains a forward-looking, vibrant hub with a future-ready workforce. Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) can connect educators and students with our network of employers, to offer them real-world insight on the skills and competencies needed in the workplace."

- Mr Sim Gim Guan, Executive Director, SNEF



Students should keep an open mind and be ready to learn from the world beyond Singapore, including through overseas exposure and interactions with friends from overseas in our schools.

Supporting more diverse pathways also means we must commit to rebalancing our priorities — from narrowly focusing on academic performance and paper qualifications, to embracing wider competencies, life skills and other personal attributes.

- ▶ The Government has reduced the frequency of school exams across all levels to free up time and space for our children to grow. We have also broadened aptitude-based admissions to autonomous universities so other factors beyond grades, such as interest and aptitude can be taken into account.
- ▶ Parents have an important role to play as well: they can avoid placing undue stress on our children to chase every last mark or pursue only narrow academic results. Instead, let us celebrate our children's unique strengths and interests, and support them on their chosen pathways.

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I pledge to let my children grow in the ways they are talented in and not to realise our unfulfilled dreams.”

*- Mr Clement Cheong,
Parent Support Group Leader*



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I pledge not to focus on scores but the learning process; be open to education paths my child selects based on her aspirations; to be her cheerleader throughout her learning journey.”

*- Mr Loh Chia Hwei Daryl,
Parent Support Group Leader*



- ▶ Employers should also commit to looking beyond qualifications; instead, they could recognise and reward diverse skills and competencies in hiring and career advancements.
- ▶ As a society, we must embrace this wider definition of success. It is about fulfilling our potential across diverse areas and also about contributing to the community and those around us so that others may also benefit.



Beyond School, Pursue Lifelong Learning



Beyond the formal education system, we will need to do more to equip Singaporeans for the lifelong journey of acquiring new skills and sharpening existing ones.

Rapid technological advancements like AI present both opportunity and disruption for industries and our jobs. We are unlikely to face a jobless future. While some jobs will become obsolete, new ones, which require new skills, will be created. This is something businesses and workers will have to adapt to.

Singaporeans understand this imperative. From our Forward SG engagements, many expressed the wish for a major skills boost in order to keep up with new skills and new needs. They hoped not just to upgrade existing skills but also to undertake a significant reboot in the middle of their careers to seize new opportunities.

Upskilling resonated strongly with participants of the National Trade Union Congress's (NTUC) #EveryWorkerMatters Conversations (#EWMC).

73%

of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that training was a meaningful use of time.



Provide training and on-the-job opportunities, and make accessing mid-career switch programmes easier. Too much paperwork and processes. And these programmes do not cater to mature workers who want to pivot."

- Anonymous response to Empower Pillar Questionnaire

At the same time, Singaporeans raised several common barriers to major upskilling.

- ▶ In-house training by employers is uneven. The best ones have more structured and tailored training programmes. But workers often find it hard to take sufficient time off to invest in meaningful skills upgrading.
- ▶ For those trying to upgrade in their own time, subsidies may only be available for the first full qualification. This means that if you had completed a diploma in your teens or twenties, enrolling in a second full-time diploma later in life could cost several times more.
- ▶ Mid-career workers also have more personal responsibilities, such as paying off housing loans and caring for children and elderly parents. With these responsibilities, it is a difficult decision to take significant time off work to study.
- ▶ Finally, those who managed to find a way to overcome the financial barriers may still feel daunted by the thought of going back to school after so long.

The challenges of staying relevant in a rapidly changing economy are real. The Government has made several moves to tackle this challenge through SkillsFuture. But more still needs to be done.



We will push for more significant investments to support mature mid-career Singaporeans to pursue substantive reskilling and upskilling. These would include:



A further, substantial top-up of the SkillsFuture Credit



Training allowances for mature mid-career Singaporeans so that they can have some financial support when they take time off for full-time, long-form training



Support for Singaporeans who already have a publicly-funded diploma or higher qualification to obtain another publicly-funded diploma qualification

Employers also need to do more, individually and collectively, to create a supportive environment for their employees to upskill.

- ▶ This includes sending employees for training and being more open to hiring mature mid-career applicants who have made a career switch.
- ▶ There are many kinds of learning and upskilling that employers are well-placed to provide: in-house courses tailored to the company's specific needs; on-the-job training where employees are given more coaching and mentoring; and career planning and rotations to build employees' skillsets.
- ▶ Employers too will benefit when they invest more in training and upskilling of their workers. They will boost their productivity and become more attractive to potential jobseekers.

FEATURE STORY

Mr Choong Chyi Kei, Chief Executive Officer of Aux Media Group, said that his company was hit hard by COVID-19 as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) and large-scale events could not be held physically.

To cope, they transformed their business model and invested in a new studio that offered extended reality (XR) technology, which blends virtual and physical worlds using augmented reality and mixed reality.



- ▶ **To prepare their existing employees to make the move to the new XR technology, they participated in Workforce Singapore's Career Conversion Programme in October 2021. Twenty employees were provided reskilling support to learn and operate the technology.**
- ▶ **Since then, the company has expanded training overseas at their Korean partner's studio in 2023, focusing on in-camera visual effects techniques, which allows them to provide more virtual production solutions to Singapore-based productions in the broadcast, media and entertainment industries.**

More importantly, individuals must take ownership of their learning throughout life; they should embrace 'career resilience' and not just 'job stability'. This includes actively seeking out available opportunities and resources to equip themselves with skills that help them stay relevant and versatile.

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[It] has been a game-changer for me! I got to connect with a community of like-minded individuals, acquired valuable skillsets and met potential employers that have empowered me to make a successful mid-career switch to the tech industry. The course fee subsidies and SkillsFuture Credit relieved the financial burden and allowed me to fully focus on the course."

- Ms Carol Wong, Data Advocate, a beneficiary of SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme (SCTP)



Ms Carol Wong, a mid-career worker in her late forties, had worked in the publishing industry for over 20 years. She developed an interest in data analytics and decided to make a career switch into the sector. She participated in the SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme Junior Data Engineer course organised by Generation Singapore, Microsoft and Temasek Polytechnic.

Through this programme, she learnt technical skills such as database management and data analytics. After completing the course in March 2023, she found a Data Advocate position at a tech consulting firm with support from Generation Singapore.



Through these combined efforts, we will give a major boost to our SkillsFuture ecosystem. We will make SkillsFuture a key pillar of our social compact.

Ultimately, the shift to become a full-fledged learning society will require each Singaporean to adopt a mindset of continuous learning. We hope to make it a norm for Singaporeans in their forties, fifties and even sixties to discuss what new skills they are planning to acquire or to enthusiastically explore new possible career pivots. Together, we can broaden our definition of success to appreciate and respect a diversity of talents, and embrace learning beyond grades.

EMBRACING LEARNING BEYOND GRADES IN A SNAPSHOT

Education has been at the heart of Singapore's remarkable transformation. Our approach to education and learning is widely recognised as one of the best in the world. Unfortunately, we have also seen mounting anxiety about exam scores and pressure to get into the 'right' schools.

Our vision is to embrace learning beyond grades — education and learning should empower us to fulfil our potential and pursue our dreams. We must also continue to evolve, to ensure that our people can navigate a world of rapid global and technological changes. Beyond the first 15 years of education, we must prepare Singaporeans for changes over the next few decades of life.

To achieve this, we will need to work hand in hand with individuals, communities and industry partners to do more in the following areas:



Give every child a good start

- ▶ We will continue to improve access to affordable and quality preschools.
- ▶ We ask this of parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and any adult who cares for our children: play a part in building our children's life skills beyond academics and inculcate in them a love for learning.
- ▶ We will work with community partners to pay special attention to children from lower-income families, so we can give them a strong start in life (more in Chapter 6).



More diverse pathways to develop every student to their full potential

- ▶ We will continue to offer varied pathways and customised learning experiences to support students' diverse potential, including through Full Subject-Based Banding, DSA, new technologies, and support for students with Special Educational Needs.
- ▶ We will also strengthen partnerships between schools, community and industry partners to give our students more opportunities to explore niche areas of interest.
- ▶ We will shift away from an excessive focus on academics towards more holistic learning based on our children's strengths, interests and chosen pathways. We ask for everyone's support in this endeavour.



Beyond school, pursue lifelong learning

- ▶ We will make SkillsFuture a key pillar of our social compact. We will invest in a significant package to help mature mid-career Singaporeans re-skill and upskill.
- ▶ We ask that employers create a supportive environment for upskilling and for everyone to take ownership of our own lifelong learning.