Source: *The Straits Times,* Front Page
Date: 18 June 2016

NUS launches centre to promote lifelong learning

It plans to offer programmes that 'stack up' towards degrees; other universities to follow

Calvin Yang

Adult learners looking to stay relevant in a rapidly evolving economy can soon take up bite-sized certificate programmes, which can be "stacked up" towards degrees, from specialised learning centres in five universities here.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) yesterday was the first to launch its lifelong learning centre, the School for Continuing and Lifelong Education (Scale).

The $12 million initiative will start with four part-time engineering degrees, in fields such as chemical engineering and electronic engineering.

There are also plans to offer certificate programmes, which can be accumulated towards the degrees. About 10 such skills-based courses, each consisting of six modules, on topics such as microelectronics and automation, are expected to be introduced by the school in August.

Scale aims to offer at least 10 degrees and more than 30 certificate programmes in the next few years.

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University, the Singapore University of Technology and Design, and Singapore Institute of Technology will also set up their own centres dedicated to lifelong learning, said Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung at the launch event.

"Just as learning does not stop after school, the universities' role in education does not stop after graduation," he said. "Centres such as Scale are seedlings that will grow into key nodes of a network of national SkillsFuture centres."

SkillsFuture is a national drive to provide Singaporeans with opportunities to develop themselves to their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of where they started from.

In time, the network will include other institutes of higher learning and private training providers, such as those offering Workforce Skills Qualifications courses, Mr Ong said.

However, he also stressed that "this is not to fuel a paper chase". Instead, it will be "an upgrade in real practical terms", such as in staying abreast of industry developments or deepening existing skills at work.

Scale, which will take into account an individual's prior learning and work experience when considering applicants, will work closely with government agencies and industry partners to design courses.

Mr Ong said the delivery of the programmes must also consider the competing demands on an adult learner's time, such as family and career.

To help working adults juggle their studies with other commitments, Scale will adopt a blended learning approach, which includes online lectures as well as discussions in class to go deeper into the concepts.

Professor Wei Kwok Kee, dean of the school, said the programmes will tap technology to cut down on the need to travel to school and promote better use of on-campus hours. These include tracking performance on online learning platforms and using the data to customise tutorials.

"We would like to make learning accessible and flexible for adult learners," he added.

calyang@sph.com.sg

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Ltd. Permission required for reproduction.