

Graduates today will need to embrace lifelong learning: Ong Ye Kung



Education Minister Ong Ye Kung at the National University of Singapore commencement dinner on July 20, 2018. PHOTO: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

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SINGAPORE - The graduates of today will need to keep going back to school as technological advances disrupt industries and affect jobs, said Education Minister Ong Ye Kung on Friday (July 20).

This then begs the question: "What is the body of knowledge and skills you need before you step out into the workforce, considering that you are going to learn for your whole life?"

There is no immediate answer. Indeed, universities around the world are grappling with the issue, said Mr Ong.

But NUS is at the forefront of it, he added when speaking to about 350 new graduates, faculty members, alumni, students and guests at the National University of Singapore (NUS) commencement dinner.

The minister had announced in March a new programme where NUS draws up plans for each student's career and learning path, for up to 20 years from the time they are admitted.

Around 300,000 NUS alumni are also automatically eligible for these courses as part of the initiative called NUS Lifelong Learners, or L³ for short.

From August, 500 continuing education and training courses will be made available to graduates still enrolled in the university.

Such learning programmes which are designed as part of the university's mission may be unique in the world, he said.

Mr Ong - a football fan - also drew on the recently concluded World Cup in Russia to share lessons he gleaned from the tournament.

He said he was fascinated by the division of labour between human referees and video assisted refereeing (VAR), which made its debut at the tournament.

What was clear is that machines will not replace humans, he said.

"If it were to happen in football, all judgement, artistry and controversy surrounding the job of the referee will be gone, and this is not what fans want," he said.

"In fact, far from destroying jobs, technology has created eight more jobs in the VAR room."

He urged graduates to have an understanding of multiple disciplines, be passionate, exercise judgement and become experts in their fields.

The World Cup final showed that it takes unique and special qualities to win, he added.

France succeeded because of the diversity of their players, while Croatia thrived because of their spirit, unity of purpose and discipline, he said.

He called on the graduates to apply this lesson to nation building.

"We know how important it is for us to stay united, purposeful, not be complacent, and forge strength through diversity as a people."