

**SPEECH BY NUS PRESIDENT PROFESSOR TAN ENG CHYE
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES
TUESDAY, 8 DECEMBER 2020 AT SHAW FOUNDATION ALUMNI HOUSE**

Ms Lai Wei Lin, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Law; and Second Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education

Mr Ye Gang, Co-Founder and Group Chief Operating Officer, Sea

Distinguished Guests

Students, Colleagues and Alumni

1. A very good morning to all of you. First of all, I would like to thank our special guests Wei Lin and Ye Gang for joining us at the launch of the new College of Humanities and Sciences, and for their participation in the panel discussion on “The Future of Work”. We are privileged to get to hear from two distinguished, young leaders from the public and private sectors. I am sure it will be an interesting and insightful discussion.

2. As Singapore’s flagship university, NUS has always been at the forefront of providing a solid education and pushing the boundaries of educational innovations. NUS seeks to spearhead integrative, interdisciplinary education. The emphasis on interdisciplinary studies and flexible, student-centric pathways is key to our mission of shaping the future of education as a world-class university, and leading this change for the next generation of students. It involves boldly changing the way we have approached and delivered education, and shifting our mindsets in order to adapt to the needs of the changing world.

3. I would like to share that interdisciplinary learning is not a new-fangled academic approach. NUS has always recognised the importance of interdisciplinary work. This is particularly evident in research, where our faculty collaborate with researchers from all across the world. Researchers combine their expertise; they can then obtain larger and better data sets, hypotheses are tested across multiple locations and settings, and this increases the robustness and impact of research.

4. In education, NUS has experimented with various initiatives over the past 20 years, and along the way, we have learnt and improved on them. For example, the Special Programme in Science, the University Scholars Programme, the University Town College Programme and Yale-NUS College. Now, with the College of Humanities and Sciences, or CHS, we will be offering our distinct interdisciplinary curriculum at scale.
5. The CHS is the result of two of our largest and most established faculties – Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science (both set up in 1929) – coming together to provide an enhanced undergraduate experience for our students. The curriculum and structure have been carefully curated to enrich and equip our students to meet the challenges of the uncertain, volatile and globally connected world that we now live in.
6. The world today is distinctly different from the time both FASS and FOS were established nearly a century ago. In education, we have evolved from a repository institution for passive knowledge accumulation to one which offers active reflection and application, global and experiential-based pathways, and interdisciplinary learning. These progressive changes are all about future-proofing our students, providing them with varied avenues for career mobility, and preparing them to thrive in the future economy. NUS seeks to groom the next generation of thinkers and doers who are agile and flexible, and can contribute effectively to nation, economy and society.
7. The workplace ecosystem too has undergone a tectonic shift toward an increasingly dynamic, intricate and interdependent environment, driven by technological changes. It is estimated that 14% of jobs in OECD countries are likely to be automated, while another 32% are at high risk of being partially automated¹. To stay relevant, our graduates of the future must acquire the skills and mindsets to adapt and navigate this new terrain and solve complex problems on multiple fronts. The CHS will help address these challenges with its emphasis on interdisciplinary learning. and by providing students with opportunities to

¹ OECD website

develop competencies across fields. Through interdisciplinary education, students will learn to harness and integrate knowledge, insights, skills and experiences across disciplines and environments. They will not be afraid of taking on new disciplines, fresh challenges or unfamiliar environments. Our students will be able to understand various perspectives and be more proficient in presenting informed solutions to multifaceted problems.

8. For example, a complex challenge such as combatting a virus like COVID-19 takes more than medical knowledge. It requires a collaborative response that integrates the disciplines of humanities, social sciences and science. Health economics, social psychology, epidemic modelling, materials science and an understanding of political context are all essential, and must work together, to save lives in a pandemic.
9. With this launch, I am pleased to share that the CHS is not a standalone effort, but the first in a pipeline of new initiatives by NUS to offer more interdisciplinary experiences. Beyond FASS and FOS, students from other Faculties and Schools would also be able to reap the benefits of interdisciplinary studies in the time ahead. We will share more about these strategic initiatives in due course.
10. Before I end, I would like to extend my thanks and congratulations to both FASS and FOS for the hard work and dedication in bringing the CHS to life. We are still in the early days, and I believe I speak for everyone involved that we are fully committed to realising this massive undertaking.
11. It is certainly a challenging and important task, and I am very hopeful of what we will achieve together in this new post-COVID world. The future of university education, and the future of work, have never been more exciting.
12. I now look forward to our panel discussion with Wei Lin and Ye Gang who will share their views on how education has to adapt to changing times and needs, and what is required of the future worker, respectively. I am sure it will be an interesting exchange of ideas. Thank you.