

Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing (centre) and Minister of State for Manpower Gan Siow Huang, accompanied by Singapore Aero Engine Services chief executive Simon Middlebrough, listening to an employee on a visit to the company's facility yesterday. PHOTO: MTI



SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

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TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER CHAN CHUN SING

Workers in aerospace sector get enhanced training support

Over 13,000 places across about 100 courses will be made available to them, with higher rates of subsidies

Toh Ting Wei

Workers in the aerospace sector, heavily battered by the Covid-19 pandemic, can now access more training courses with higher rates of subsidies.

More than 13,000 training places across about 100 courses will be made available to the sector. The training will cover topics such as aircraft maintenance, analytics and robotics operation.

Workers who go for the training will continue to receive their pay during the training period, with wage and course fee subsidies of up to 90 per cent.

Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing and Minister of State for Manpower Gan Siow Huang announced the support measure, which is expected to cost about \$14 million, during a visit to the Singapore Aero Engine Services

facility in Loyang yesterday.

The courses will be conducted by the National University of Singapore, NTUC LearningHub, SIA Engineering Company, ST Engineering Aerospace and Temasek Polytechnic.

The measure is an extension of the Enhanced Training Support Package, which had initially been offered to six other industries hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

So far, more than 35,000 employees from 920 businesses in tourism, air transport, retail, food services, land transport and arts and culture have tapped the package. As a worker can take more than one course, a total of 84,000 training places have been taken up.

Mr Chan said that while the aerospace sector has been hit by a fall in demand, its medium- to long-term prospects are still good.

"We are not just investing in the skills for the current generation of

engines but also in new skills, including the digital skills to manage the new generation of engines that will propel the aviation sector," he added.

Mr Chan also emphasised the long-term importance of retaining workers in the sector.

Noting that the capabilities in the aerospace industry are unique, he said: "It is not something that you can pick up and then let go, before coming back (to it) again. So it is important that we continue to maintain a certain consistency in the workflow... without which it will be very hard for us to ramp up the number of qualified engineers required for the industry when demand returns."

SkillsFuture Singapore and the Economic Development Board said the additional training support will help tide the sector over the current crisis and prepare for recovery.

The aerospace sector accounted

for 1 per cent of Singapore's gross domestic product and churned out \$13.1 billion in output last year. It employs more than 22,000 workers, of whom 74 per cent are professionals, managers, executives and technicians.

Businesses in the aerospace sector range from those doing aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul to those manufacturing plane components. Companies in the related aviation sector include commercial carriers like Singapore Airlines and cargo handlers.

But as demand for air travel has been almost wiped out by the Covid-19 pandemic, both sectors have been hit hard.

Aerospace giant Pratt & Whitney last month laid off around 400 employees – 20 per cent of its workforce – at five of its six facilities.

Mr Sazali Zainal, vice-chairman of the NTUC Aerospace and Aviation Cluster and president of the

Singapore Industrial and Services Employees' Union, said that the unions have been lobbying hard for an enhanced training and support package as part of efforts to save jobs.

He urged companies to take advantage of this opportunity to further train workers and to work with the unions to overcome any challenges they may face.

Mr Sia Kheng Yok, chief executive of the Association of Aerospace Industries, said the Covid-19 pandemic has sped up industry and technology changes, which in turn have made it more urgent to upskill workers.

He said the aerospace community welcomed the enhanced training support, and added: "It is an encouragement to prepare workers for changes ahead, and to renew and reinforce our core capabilities."

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In numbers: Singapore's aerospace sector

The aerospace sector focuses on four key services – manufacturing; maintenance, repair operations (MRO); innovation; and aftermarket services. It has been hit hard by the fall in demand for air travel triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

• 1 per cent of GDP, with

\$13.1b

total output in 2019

• More than

22,000

workers employed; **80 per cent** of the workers are local, and **74 per cent** are PMETs.

• Made up of about

130 firms

• MRO output in Singapore alone contributes to

10%

of global output

• Key firms operating in Singapore include Airbus, Boeing, Bombardier, Rolls-Royce and GE Aviation.

2,000

graduates from aerospace-related courses yearly across the various educational institutions

Source: MTI, EDB STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS