Adult education system ‘has to keep evolving’

Cavin Yang

Singapore has to keep evolving its adult education system so that its people can stay ahead of others in this rapidly changing economy, said Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office (Cabinet) Chan Chun Sing yesterday.

Speaking at a panel discussion at the inaugural Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Alumni Awareness Gala Reunion, he said that workers should be equipped with the skill sets needed for tomorrow, rather than just today’s jobs.

“There is no point for us to get yesterday’s jobs, or even today’s jobs, for today’s Singaporeans,” he said. “The question is whether we can get tomorrow’s jobs for today’s Singaporeans.”

Only then can Singaporeans take care of themselves and their families going forward, said Mr Chan, adding that Singapore needs to move from “compulsory education” to “employability education”. He shared how career guidance, for instance, already well-established in institutions here, can be made more accessible to adult workers so that they can take on new opportunities when they come.

The gala reunion, held at Shangri-La Hotel, is a new platform for the university’s alumni award winners to engage in a dialogue with a Singapore President and NTU leaders on future-oriented issues.

During the discussion on the challenges and opportunities in the future economy, Mr Chan, who is also labour chief, touched on the fine balance in deciding new technology to adopt, so that no Singaporean, young or old, is left behind.

He also urged Singaporeans to continue building links beyond one another, and guard against developing an “island mentality”.

The other panelists included Mr V T Madhavan, a former minister of state; Mr Tan Chuan How, chair of the NTU board of trustees; and Dr Liu Jin, chief executive of NTU’s Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

The session was led by Mr Sanjeev Singh, a member of the NTU board of trustees and a former director general of NTU.

At the event attended by some 450 guests, NTU also established an endowed professorship in early childhood education in honour of its vice-president for alumni and advancement.

The Lee Sing Kang Professorship in Early Childhood Education honours his contributions, in particular his lifelong dedication to early childhood education. It will be held by a mid-career professor or emerging scholar for Singaporean students from less privileged families will also be set up.

Prof Lee, a former National Institute of Education director, died on May 19 this year, at age 68. Both the professorship and bursary will be funded through a new endowed fund.

NTU president Bertil Andersson said Prof Lee had served “with immense commitment and dedication” and the professorship will continue Prof Lee’s “legacy of nurturing the importance of education”.

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GETTING TODAY’S JOBS

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MECHANIZING: Minister to the Prime Minister’s Office