

Mr John De Payva, President of NTUC,

Mr Zee Yoong Kang, CEO, Employability & Employment Institute

Friends and colleagues,

1. I am happy to join you this morning for the opening of the Employability and Employment Institute (e2i).

National CET Masterplan

2. Continuing education and training (or CET) is one of the Govern-ment's top priorities. A highly skilled and productive workforce is one critical advantage that we must have to compete against others with abundant natural resources. We stepped up our efforts in CET after the Asian Financial Crisis. At that time, the immediate need was to re-train displaced workers, and help them upgrade their skills and find new jobs. But we should not see this as a priority only during an economic downturn. Instead, CET should be a core part of the lifelong development of every worker. If we want Singapore to keep growing, our workers too must constantly upgrade.

3. This requires a change in mindset from the old paradigm of completing your schooling, and then leaving it behind to pursue your career and work. With a rapidly changing business and employment landscape, workers have to continually pick up new skills and knowledge. No matter how useful the skills and qualifications we attain in school are when we graduate, they will become steadily less relevant over time. To prepare our workers for the future, we must systematically support them throughout their working lives with skills upgrading and lifelong learning.

- 4. Other countries have done a lot to build a good infrastructure for CET. Australia, Canada, UK and other European countries spend around 0.3% or more of their GDP on worker training. They provide effective platforms for mid-career workers to seek new pathways and opportunities. For example, manufacturing workers can go for training, and equip themselves for jobs in new services industries like IT, finance or other professions.**
- 5. We have studied this carefully and decided to give a bigger push for CET in Singapore. A national CET Masterplan is in place to spur coordinated efforts over the next 10 years. Clear goals to push up various sectors have been laid down. First-class adult training institutions and more resources will be needed.**
- 6. Today, the Government spends about \$200 million or 0.1% of GDP on adult worker training. We have set up the Lifelong Learning Endowment Fund (LLEF), with a target amount of \$5 billion. So far, we have built it up to \$2.2 billion. We will progressively top this up over the next few years. This year, I expect the Minister for Finance to be able to make a significant contribution to the LLEF in the Budget. The additional resources will help us achieve intermediate goals of our CET Masterplan quicker. We will quadruple the current CET capacity, from about 20,000 to 80,000 trainees every year. We will expand the offering of programmes to cover many more industries. The courses will span all levels, from rank and file to professionals, managers and executives. All workers should be able to embark on progression pathways throughout their working lives. If we do this well, we will deepen the skills base of our workforce, help workers to respond quickly to changes in the job market, and sharpen the competitiveness of our economy.**
- 7. However, it is not just how much we spend that counts. Money is not the key issue here. No matter how much resources we put into training, we will not be able to achieve our goals without the right attitude and mindset, amongst both companies and workers. Companies need to see the value of investing in the training and development of their people, to achieve better business performance. Workers need to keep an open mind to alternative careers and opportunities, and make adjustments throughout their working life. It will take time to bring about this mindset change. We must start from young, so that our children will see learning not as a chore, but a lifelong habit.**
- 8. Mature workers may find it more difficult to continue with lifelong learning, for as we grow older it takes more of an effort to study new things, and pick up fresh skills. But those who have persevered have reaped the benefits. Like the three you just saw in the video – Mr Mohamed Bali Bin Kartio, Mdm Lim Hui Bin, and Mr Jamaludin Bin Samad, who have gained confidence from their training and progressed in their careers. There are many more like them, who are quietly making the effort to upgrade, re-skill and stay relevant to industry needs. I hope they will inspire others around them to do the same. Lifelong learning will help to keep our minds active, alert and engaged. It will enrich our lives, and improve our employability. Over time we must foster a culture that truly makes continuous education and lifelong learning a way of life.**

9. The CET Masterplan involves several agencies, but MOM is coordinating the overall effort with MOE. The Government will provide more details in the coming Budget Debate. Today, let me just touch on two principles that underpin our CET approach

Cater to Needs of Adult Workers

10. First, we will ensure that the CET system caters specifically to the needs of adult workers. CET is not about putting trainees through a long academic programme, because the needs of adults and students are very different. A good education programme for students does not necessarily translate into a good training programme for adults.

11. Adult workers have family and other responsibilities, and so their opportunity cost for training is high. Hence CET courses have to be modular, flexible and focus only on the skills required at the workplace. They have to use teaching methods that are tuned to the strengths of adult learners. This is a new capability that we have to start to build and strengthen.

12. Furthermore, the CET system cannot just be narrowly focussed on training. Workers will be more committed if training leads to a better-paying job and a more secure career. CET institutions must therefore help adults prepare for the changes in mindsets, work habits and attitudes needed for new jobs and careers. They must also have a strong operating capability to reach out to workers, motivate them to go for training and match them with suitable jobs upon graduation.

Adopt a Tripartite Approach

13. Second, the Government will adopt a tripartite approach in executing our CET strategy. Good CET delivery requires first-class training institutions, which offer high-quality and industry-relevant courses leading to national qualifications.

14. For the public sector, we will mobilise the polytechnics and ITEs so that their ready expertise and infrastructure for pre-employment education can be extended to CET and adult workers. We have already started with the Singapore Institute of Retail Studies and the Security Industry Institute, so far with encouraging results.

15. The private sector also has a key role to play. Private training providers can complement the public institutions to provide more opportunities for lifelong learning. At the same time, industry associations should take up the challenge to adopt national skills standards and develop new competencies in their respective industries.

16. Of course, the partnership of the Labour Movement is crucial to the success of our CET efforts. NTUC has always played a leading role in advocating worker training. And it has backed up its words with strong and effective action. Over the years, NTUC has built up significant capability in training promotion and delivery. It is one of the largest providers of adult training in Singapore, with strengths in IT, literacy, employability and

workplace safety.

17. NTUC also plays a critical role in helping workers see the value of CET and encouraging them to take full advantage of the opportunities for training. With its strong outreach capabilities and direct links with employers, NTUC can mobilise large numbers of workers to go for training and match trainees to jobs when they graduate. Most importantly, NTUC is in tune with the concerns and mindset of workers, and has their trust and confidence to do what is in their best long-term interests.

e2i

18. Today, the Labour Movement is once again taking the lead. NTUC has a solid track record in helping workers upgrade and find jobs with better pay. NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute, or e2i, will add to these efforts. The e2i will be one of our key CET providers. It will be a convenient one-stop shop, which all workers can go to for their employment and employability needs, be it training, job search or career guidance. The e2i has been in operation for 4 months since September last year. It is off to a good start. It has already trained 3,000 workers, and helped 230 unemployed workers to find jobs. For the whole of 2008, it plans to train more than 10,000 workers, and secure 2,000 job placements.

19. The Government fully supports the e2i project. e2i will be a key driver for the adoption of national qualifications and skills standards across all industries. Its work will go beyond skills training and job placements to address systemic industry issues that affect worker productivity. For example, the institute plans to work closely with the Government and employers to re-design jobs for more viable career progression paths, review and streamline regulatory mechanisms, and raise the level of HR practices. With a broad spectrum of capabilities in the e2i, the Labour Movement will be better positioned to champion the cause of workers, whether they are unemployed, low-wage workers, back-to-work women or mature workers, and provide for their training needs and welfare.

Conclusion

20. The CET Masterplan is a long-term strategic move that will support our economic growth and provide Singaporeans with the opportunities to equip themselves with new skills, stay employable and secure good jobs. This is a sound investment in our economic competitiveness and the future of our workers. I look forward to e2i playing a key role in this important mission, and wish the Labour Movement every success in this new and important endeavour.