SkillsFuture Festival x NUS 2025
Welcome Address by NUS President, Professor Tan Eng Chye
Saturday 12 July 2025, 9.30 am, Stephen Riady Centre Auditorium 2

Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment,

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Alumni and Friends,

Good morning and welcome to the eighth SkillsFuture Festival[1]. NUS is delighted to host SkillsFuture Festival 2025. This is the second time the event is held on our campus grounds; the first time was some six years ago.

Introduction

Much has changed since Covid-19 struck. Beyond health and healthcare, the global pandemic upended education, work and livelihoods, and brought profound changes to industries, supply chains and the economy. In parallel, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved rapidly. AI is increasingly integrated into various aspects of daily life, bringing convenience, productivity and new possibilities, but also disrupting work, job roles and industries. The geopolitical landscape has, in the face of wars and trade disputes, become more tense and uncertain.

Such developments have reinforced the importance of building resilience and agility as we will all have to continually adapt to thrive and seize opportunities in this era of change and uncertainty. Through lifelong learning, we renew our knowledge, skills and mindsets, giving us the confidence to take on the future.

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[1] https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/inaugural-learning-festival-with-350-activities-many-discounted-courses-and-e-books

SkillsFuture Festival 2025

It is fitting that SkillsFuture Festival 2025 is reprising the theme of 'FutureWork', which focuses on the knowledge and skills that our people and industries need to stay relevant and to thrive.

To help us better understand and appreciate global developments and the wider operating context, I am glad that we have three NUS faculty with expertise across business, economics, scenario planning and public policy here with us today. Emeritus Professor Bernard Yeung, Professor Danny Quah, and Dr Adrian Kuah will be sharing their observations, insights and analysis at the panel discussion later. I look forward to a lively discussion.

The SkillsFuture Festival will also feature a range of workshops and exhibitions on highly current and relevant themes such as the use of AI agents, design and AI, technopreneurship for SME leaders, sustainability and more. The Festival showcases the creative and diverse approaches by the 12 Institutes of Higher Learning in Singapore. Here, I would like to thank our co-organisers, namely, SkillsFuture Singapore and the Lifelong Learning Singapore which was formerly known as Lifelong Learning Institute, as well as our IHL partners, for putting this event together.

It is heartening to see the Singapore lifelong learning ecosystem maturing. IHLs are collaborating with each other and with industry practitioners to offer high quality and industry-relevant training. For example, NUS, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Ngee Ann Polytechnic recently signed an MOU with UOB FinLab, to assist small and medium businesses in digitalisation and sustainability. UOB is a SkillsFuture Queen Bee organisation. It is also a long-time partner of NUS – various NUS schools including NUS-ISS, School of Computing and School of Continuing and Lifelong Education have been involved in the training of UOB's Data Management Office and other staff.

In helping the workforce to upskill, NUS pays special attention to our former students. We aim to support our alumni in lifelong learning, and I am heartened to see many alumni in the audience. Our schools have organised a series of 'Back to School' activities for alumni to stay abreast of new developments and technology. The NUS Business School and the College of

Design and Engineering[2] have organised two workshops in conjunction with the SkillsFuture Festival.

Update on Lifelong Learning Developments at NUS

On this occasion, I would like to take the opportunity to share some of the latest developments at NUS in the lifelong learning space. As Singapore's flagship public university, NUS is committed to helping our workforce and industries to upskill, to reskill and to transform.

(i)   SkillsFuture Career Transition Programmes

First, NUS will be developing a slate of new SkillsFuture Career Transition Programmes, or SCTPs to help Singaporeans and PRs pivot to exciting careers in new, emerging industries. The NUS Asian Institute of Digital Finance is launching an STCP on using AI to facilitate operations and decision-making in finance. Another upcoming SCTP is a partnership with Esri, an industry leader in geographic information system software, which trains participants in geospatial technologies for roles in urban planning and location intelligence.

(ii)   Expanding Master's Degree Programmes in AI

Second, NUS is expanding our Master's degree programme offerings in Artificial Intelligence, which is a key and pervasive technology powering all industries in the modern world. Recognising that AI is applied differently across settings and fields, NUS has launched a suite of four Master's degree programmes to meet the needs of specific target groups, namely for
a.   IT professionals training to be AI researchers and engineers;
b.   Scientists and researchers using AI for scientific advancement;
c.   Executives harnessing AI to innovate in business; and
d.   An Executive Master's for business and industry leaders.

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[2] https://scale.nus.edu.sg/programmes/lifelonglearning/alumni#back-to-school

This tailored approach will ensure that the programme's content and skills taught are immediately applicable to our graduates' chosen careers and industries. This is made possible because NUS is a large and comprehensive university – we can leverage the multidisciplinary expertise of our schools and faculty to design diverse programmes that meet different needs.

(iii)   New Bachelor of Information Technology for Working Adults

Third, NUS launched a Bachelor of Information Technology in August last year. This programme is unique in that it is a new undergraduate degree, but specifically designed for working adults, offering part-time study options alongside numerous short courses and certificates in data and AI from a host of departments across our Schools and Faculties.

Here, I would like to share that NUS is continually innovating to see how our lifelong learning offerings can be more accessible to working adults. We understand the job demands and time constraints that working professionals face. NUS has been working to introduce more flexibility and stackability in our course offerings. For example, the NUS Business School recently launched a new flexible pathway, where learners can stack microcredits towards an Executive Certificate in Strategic Business Management and Leadership. This Executive Certificate can in turn offset course credits if he or she subsequently enrols in the MBA or eMBA programmes.

(i)   New NUS Distinguished Senior Fellowship Programme

The fourth CET development that I would like to share is a new, first of its kind life transition programme set in Asia, called the NUS Distinguished Senior Fellowship Programme. The programme supports and inspires senior leaders in the government, business and industry sectors as they transition from their professional careers. Next month, we will welcome the inaugural cohort of leaders from diverse professional backgrounds spanning from finance, consulting, healthcare, architecture, law, and more[3]. They will be going on a journey of inquiry and discovery to define their post-

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[3] https://scale.nus.edu.sg/home/dsfp#fellows

professional purpose, and drawing on their deep experience and networks to make a meaningful impact on themselves and on society.

NUS as a Learning Laboratory for CET Innovations

As a large organisation and champion of lifelong learning, NUS is a living laboratory and a testbed for CET innovations, such as in developing stackable pathways or credentialing pathways. In 2020, NUS rolled out a Data Literacy Programme for our executive and administrative staff, which combines full-time work contextualised with real world use cases, problem sets and project work. More than 4,300 NUS staff have completed at least the basic level of the Data Literacy Programme or DLP. We make it mandatory for all our admin staff to take the basic coursework programme. Over time, intermediate and advanced data literacy courses were added and we trialled designing DLP courses to allow for progression and stackability. The DLP is now offered as a stackable blended learning programme with micro-credentials and pathways leading to a Master of Science in Applied Data Science. In essence, this adult learning model is built on a certificate coming from our basic, intermediate and advanced courses which are given free to our admin staff. Once they complete the advanced course, they get a skills allowance. This skills allowance is about $850 per month. On top of the skills allowance, the University will sponsor them for a Master's Programme in Data Analytics, and we have three Master's programmes in data analytics. After they have completed the Master's Programme, they will have their skills allowance increased to $1,250 per month. This is a credentialing pathway that we have put in place for our administrative staff at NUS. By the end of the year, we will be building another credentialing pathway for AI, and we feel that this is a very interesting learning model, and we have engaged industry on this. We are working, for instance, with the Singapore Maritime Foundation to contextualise the programme for the maritime industry.

A similar pathway is being developed for AI. NUS is creating a suite of credit bearing courses from basic AI-aware level to advanced AI-adept level with workforce applications, that are stackable towards various qualifications. The courses will complement the suite of Generative AI tools available to NUS staff to augment their productivity, creativity and information access. Tools were developed by NUSIT for our staff to leverage on Gen-AI include

    a.   AI-Chat for content generation;

    b.   AI-Guide for policy-related inquiries;

    c.   AI-Draw to transform text into images;

    d.   AI-Minute to automate meeting minute-taking;

    e.   AI-Discover to facilitate deeper understanding of research documents and papers; and

    f.   AI-Create to develop AI agents without coding.

NUS is planning an AI Hackathon, scheduled for January 2026, where faculties and departments will have the opportunity to showcase innovative ideas on leveraging Gen AI in the workplace. In addition, NUS IT regularly conducts briefing and clinic sessions to guide our admin staff on the effective use of Gen AI tools, ranging from NUS's own AI-Know platform to other commercial solutions approved for use within the university. To date, these sessions have benefited more than 130 departments and over 1,300 staff members.

Conclusion

Time flies, and 2025 marks the tenth year of the SkillsFuture movement, SG60 and NUS120. It is perhaps also timely that we re-imagine how universities and society can prepare for a 100-year life, and the role of lifelong learning for an extended lifespan. Lifelong learning is not only for our work and careers, it is also about personal fulfilment and growth, satisfying our curiosity, broadening our perspectives, building character and embracing life and all that comes at us.

On this note, I wish everyone a fruitful and enjoyable SkillsFuture Festival 2025. Thank you.