

40% more sign-ups for adult learner programmes in last 5 years

Increase driven by introduction of shorter, stackable micro-credentials at institutes

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More adult learners have been signing up for programmes at institutes of higher learning (IHLs), driven by the introduction of bite-size stackable micro-credentials, which have made educational opportunities more accessible.

Senior Minister of State for Education Janil Puthucheary on July 12 said there has been a 40 per cent increase in the last five years.

Speaking at SkillsFuture Festival x NUS 2025 held at the National University of Singapore, he said that in 2024, about 188,000 individuals enrolled in continuing education and training programmes that were supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and SkillsFuture Singapore at the IHLs.

This is more than three times the pre-employment training intake, or the number of students enrolled in courses prior to starting work, across the IHLs, Dr Janil, who is also Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment, added.

He said: "This increase is due to both higher training demand, as well as expanded upgrading pathways and opportunities that are being created."

Dr Janil said that IHLs have made their programmes more accessible to adult learners, offering most of them in the form of stackable micro-credentials – shorter and more specialised courses that can be stacked towards a degree or other qualifications – for more manageable and flexible learning. "This allows working adults to better juggle work and upgrading," he said.

Dr Janil said that following the introduction of work-study programmes enabling participants to earn and learn through training delivered by IHLs and employers, about 1,300 Institute of Technical Education (ITE) graduates today – or 10 per cent of each graduating cohort – pursue an ITE work-study diploma, achieving good employment outcomes.

He also noted that the Singapore Institute of Technology was set up to provide degree pathways for polytechnic upgraders, while the Singapore University of Social Sciences focuses on giving similar opportunities to adult learners.

He highlighted the recent expansion of the lifetime cohort participation rate – referring to the percentage of school leavers and adult learners given places in MOE-funded degree programmes – which is aimed at providing more publicly funded degree places for adult learners.

Dr Janil said the IHLs have also diversified their continuing education and training offerings beyond full qualifications to offer shorter skills booster programmes such as the SkillsFuture Series, which addresses emerging skills needs in the digital, care and green economies.

The IHLs are rolling out 54 new courses in 2025 under the SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme, he said. This initiative aims to help mid-career individuals transition into new sectors or explore better job prospects by providing industry-relevant training with employment assistance.

A press release from NUS and SkillsFuture Singapore on July 12 announced that these new courses are designed to help mid-career individuals adapt to evolving job demands – from pivoting into new sectors, to launching entrepreneurial ventures, to upskilling in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) and immersive media.

These courses include those equipping individuals with the skills to become pastry and baking specialists and wellness professionals.

Dr Janil said the new courses mean that more mid-career Singaporeans can benefit from these programmes, adding that those aged 40 and above will enjoy 90 per cent course fee subsidies and can offset their remaining out-of-pocket fees using the \$4,000 SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career).

Those undergoing training full-time can also apply for the SkillsFuture Mid-Career Training Allowance.

He urged IHLs to consider advancing their efforts in relation to SkillsFuture in order to keep pace with the rapid evolution of AI. Institutions must refresh their AI training curriculum and materials at a faster pace, while adult educators should continually upgrade their skills to ensure that they are up to date with industry developments and training methods, he said.

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