

SkillsFuture launches new lifelong learning award

16 Singaporeans and 26 employers recognised at awards ceremony

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What began as drumming sessions in his four-room Tampines HDB flat took Singaporean musician Er Chow Kiat to stages with music artistes JJ Lin and Angela Chang.

Today, the 35-year-old self-taught drummer is the founder of Drum Tutor SG, and pursuing a Master of Music Leadership at the National University of Singapore (NUS), in the hope of enhancing his teaching and holding inclusive drumming events.

Mr Er was one of 16 Singaporeans who received the SkillsFuture Fellowship at the SkillsFuture Fellowships and SkillsFuture Employer Awards Ceremony 2025, and received \$10,000 to continue to master his skill.

Recognising and celebrating individuals who exemplify the spirit of lifelong learning is important, said Education Minister Desmond Lee at the ceremony on Nov 7 at Gardens by the Bay.

"It is important that we not just encourage, but also support individuals and employers to come on board the SkillsFuture movement."

To celebrate more of such individuals, a new award recognising graduates of continuing education and training (CET) programmes from the polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) will be launched from 2026, said Mr Lee.

The SkillsFuture Lifelong Learning Award, jointly launched by SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), the five polytechnics and ITE, will recognise up to 18 CET graduates each year from these institutions.

The award will go to individuals who embody the spirit of lifelong learning and upskilling, and have made a positive impact in their workplaces, said Mr Lee.

It aims to honour their commitment to continuous learning and their contributions to skills development in their work, social and learning communities. Each award



Singaporean musician Er Chow Kiat, a self-taught drummer who is now the founder of Drum Tutor SG, was one of 16 Singaporeans who received the SkillsFuture Fellowship at the SkillsFuture Fellowships and SkillsFuture Employer Awards Ceremony 2025. He received \$10,000 to continue to master his skill. ST PHOTOS: KEVIN LIM

recipient will receive \$1,000, and awardees will be selected by respective institutions.

Mr Lee announced this new award at the ceremony held at Gardens by the Bay, where 16 Singaporeans and 26 employers were recognised for their commitment to skills mastery and workforce development.

Recipients received awards from President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the guest of honour at the event. Senior Minister of State for Education and Sustainability and the Environment Janil Puthucherry was also in attendance.

Mr Lee said Singapore has a "good quality training ecosystem" with strong participation, adding that more than 500,000 Singaporeans take up SkillsFuture courses and more than 24,000 employers

send their employees for training.

He added that the SkillsFuture movement remains critical today, with a rapidly evolving external environment and shorter technological cycles among other changes that create more uncertainty and unpredictability.

But it is not always easy to commit to training, Mr Lee said, and there are opportunity costs such as work and family, and physical strain, and employers have to face reduced staffing and bear training costs.

This is where the awards come in, to continue to support and encourage both individuals and employers, he added.

The SkillsFuture Fellowships recognise Singaporeans who have achieved skills mastery in their fields, embraced lifelong learning



Education Minister Desmond Lee said the new award will recognise graduates of continuing education and training programmes from the polytechnics and the ITE, and will be launched from 2026.

and committed themselves to mentoring others.

Mr Er, a SkillsFuture fellow, discovered his love for drumming at the age of 14. The passion later led

him to pursue a diploma at Lasalle College of the Arts, win a scholarship to the Musicians Institute in Hollywood and eventually open his own drum school, which start-

ed out from his room in his HDB flat.

"My parents were supportive, and my father bought me my first drum kit," he said, recalling that despite his family's modest means, "that was the biggest blessing".

It was during his time at Lasalle, and later through the Hollywood scholarship, that he gained formal training from top musicians and found faith in his own abilities.

"It was a lot of self-motivation," said Mr Er, who supported himself in the US and worked on a cruise as a musician to continue pursuing his passion. "The stars also aligned for me."

Returning to Singapore in 2016, he opened Drum Tutor SG and has since taught more than 1,000 students. Beyond teaching, he mentors new hires and trains mid-career drummers, even sending them overseas to music conferences to further develop their skills.

Yet, he felt something was missing. "I did not have a bachelor's degree, and I felt it was not enough if I really wanted to master my craft," he said. This inspired him to enrol in the Master of Music Leadership programme at Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, NUS, in August.

As he continues his studies, Mr Er hopes to keep tutoring, mentoring, performing and organising inclusive drumming events where people of all ages can learn and enjoy playing the drums.

Awards were also given out to employers that excel in developing the skills of their employees and fostering a culture of lifelong learning at the workplace.

These include social service organisation Fei Yue Community Services, construction company Kimly Construction and retail store Don Don Donki.

Mr Lee said the Government will support individuals looking to up-skill, as well as employers in building capabilities in skills-first practices.

Individuals can receive help through subsidies and SkillsFuture credits, and programmes like the SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme, and get access to the latest job-skills insights so they can make more informed decisions, Mr Lee said.

He added that employers can get customised advice from the Centre for Skills-First Practices, newly set up in October and, together with the Government, identify and teach in-demand skills and receive financial support.

"As we look ahead, let us reaffirm our commitment to our SkillsFuture movement, so that our individuals and enterprises can be competitive, adaptable and resilient no matter what headwinds come our way," Mr Lee said.

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