

## Manpower Ministry launches new skills programme to help PMETs

SINGAPORE: The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) are introducing a new scheme to help professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs) to survive the current economic downturn.

Called the Professional Skills Programme (PSP), it will bring together all current skills upgrading and job assistance schemes.

The PSP was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during a forum with some 550 union and business leaders on Sunday afternoon.

Mr Lee warned Singaporeans of more uncertain times ahead for the economy. "Over the next 4, 5 years, 2, 3% growth, I think that's not bad. 3, 4% growth, I would say we're lucky," he said.

To help, he said the government is scaling up training programmes - this time, for the PMETs.

Mr Lee said: "I know the PMETs sometimes say the government takes care of the low income, the poor. (They say) 'we're not poor but we also need help'".

"We have, right now, programmes for conversion from one profession to another. But we don't have programmes for upgrading within the same profession. So we'll now introduce programmes to upgrade people in the same industry."

These include degree and masters programmes in technology and social work with course fee subsidies of up to 90% under the government's Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience, or SPUR.

Acting Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong said: "There are also companies who come to us to say that they want to keep their PMETs, but at the same time, they need to upgrade their skills. Therefore, under PSP, we'll also have programmes to allow PMETs to upgrade their skills so they can be more effective on their skill levels."

Examples of programmes expected to be rolled out in the next few months include a Master of Science Programme in Integrated Circuit Design at NTU-TUM (Technical University of Munich) for integrated circuit design engineers and a Bachelor of Social Work at SIM University for social workers. More will be introduced progressively in coming months.

Professionals in finance and engineering can also upgrade through specialised courses. They can specialise in risk management or product control at NUS' Risk Management Institute and Financial Training Institute@Singapore Management University (SMU).



Office staff walk out for lunch break at the financial district in Singapore.

Other programmes include the WSQ Diploma in Tourism and Specialised Training Programme in Pharmaceutical Manufacturing (Validation).

New or existing operations/customer service managers can take the WSQ Diploma in Tourism to pick up skills to manage their businesses more effectively.

Engineering professionals in the pharmaceutical and biologics sectors can take the Specialised Training Programme in Pharmaceutical Manufacturing (Validation) to become validation specialists.

PMETs can also take up leadership and management skills training. It will cover skills essential for PMETs to drive changes, build relationships, achieve results, develop people and personal effectiveness.

Such training complements existing Employability Skills System (ESS) courses for PMETs such as communication and relationship management, learning and personal development, problem solving and decision making, and workplace safety and health.

There will also be career workshops for PMETs. WDA, together with the Career Centres at the Community Development Councils and NTUC's e2i, has launched a series of career workshops for PMETs to help them build up communication skills, interview, resume writing and networking skills.

More information on the PSP is available at the WDA website, or you can call WDA at 6883-5885.

Union leaders say the new scheme will motivate PMETs to improve and stay competitive.

Tan Peng Heng, president of Industrial & Services Employees' Union, said: "We have a lot of executives who want to take up courses, masters diplomas, but they have to go through certain stringent screening by the companies. With this scheme rolled out, they will be able to choose what course they want to upgrade, at the same time they can claim the course fees back, up to 80 or 90%."

Besides upgrading workers' skills, Prime Minister Lee said Singapore is also looking at niche areas where there are opportunities to recover faster.

He said the Economic Development Board is already working hard to bring in more projects from overseas.

But the country must also not chase away foreign workers.

"Shift work, also not popular for Singaporeans. The factories which are here have three shifts. First shift, Singaporeans; second shift, half-Singaporeans; third shift, all foreigners. You want to send home the foreigners? Companies will be gone," said Mr Lee.

And, the Prime Minister said, despite the downturn, Singapore is still attracting foreign investments. Abbot Laboratories is opening its US\$300m manufacturing facility in the next few days. In March, Neste Oil will begin construction of a new plant to produce the world's cleanest renewable diesel.