

**OPENING ADDRESS BY MR TAN KOK YAM, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SKILLSFUTURE SINGAPORE & CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE FOR ADULT LEARNING COUNCIL, AT THE INSTITUTE FOR ADULT LEARNING 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS & OPENING OF THE ADULT LEARNING COLLABORATORY ON 1 AUG 2024, LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE**

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Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Education & Manpower

Madam Halimah Yacob, Chancellor of Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS)

Mrs Mildred Tan, Chairman, Board of Trustees of SUSS

Professor Tan Tai Yong, President of SUSS

Assoc Prof Yeo Li Pheow, Executive Director of Institute for Adult Learning

Distinguished Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen

Good morning,

1. Today marks a significant milestone as we celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Institute for Adult Learning.

2. IAL was established in 2019 as an autonomous institution under SUSS. Its role is to enable adult educators to deliver lifelong learning, that equips individuals with the skills for their current jobs, and the confidence to pursue future goals. Why adult educators? They are the last mile to the learners. The actual learning experience is defined by a learner's engagement with educators, and his engagement with the material they design. A strong adult educator corps, competent in andragogy, current in industry knowledge, and confident in classroom innovation, is a force multiplier for the rest of our workforce.

**IAL's achievement**

3. Since its establishment, IAL has served over 65,000 trainees, to fill various roles in adult education, including classroom delivery, curriculum design and workplace learning facilitation. Its expanded curriculum now offers diverse programmes from

foundational to advanced levels, including WSQ advanced certificates, diplomas, post graduate courses and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. And it is continually innovating and refreshing these offerings. The staple programme, the WSQ Advanced Certificate in Learning and Performance (or WSQ ACLP), has been revamped to be shorter and sharper, to focus more on innovation in learning technique, and on effective learning beyond the classroom. The training places for the WSQ ACLP qualification (now WSQ ACLP 2.0) have grown by 2/3 in 2023 alone, from 11,000 in 2022 to about 18,000 in 2023 – that’s the annual intake. IAL has reached out and worked with industries and unions to train-the-trainer in specific domains; for example, with NTUC and NTUC LearningHub to train Chinese speaking bus driver instructors. It has worked jointly with its mothership, SUSS, to establish two joint programmes: the Master in Boundary-Crossing Learning and Leadership and the Graduate Certificate in Workplace Learning. As for continual professional development, IAL is bolstering its commitment by expanding its CPD suite to over 80 programs by the end of 2024. In parallel, it will deliver 100 microlearning courses, offering learners a diverse and accessible pathway to upskilling. It has built an active, buzzing Adult Education Network that is 12,500 strong, and has plans to further professionalise the corps.

4. Equipping our adult educators goes beyond just training; it involves ongoing research to understand the complexities of adult learning. This includes studying how different pedagogies, personal motivation, job design, and technology, impact learning outcomes. IAL also undertakes experimentation and innovation to put new theories of learning into practice. Some of IAL’s work in this space have been fascinating. There was a 2022 study into “productive failure”, to examine how to get learners to devise novel solutions to complex issues. Under its innovSpur initiative, IAL supported various companies including one named “Bluente”, an online language learning platform. The app is helping foreign nurses familiarise themselves with local dialects, such as Hokkien and Cantonese.

## **ALC's promise**

5. The establishment of the Adult Learning Collaboratory (ALC) is a fitting milestone to IAL's fifth anniversary. "Collaboratory" plays on the words "collaborate" and "laboratory". We are indeed collaborating to experiment, and experimenting on how to collaborate. This is precisely what we need in the next phase of the SkillsFuture movement, to connect the dots well and discover new ways to configure ourselves to serve learners better. I am glad that we have many partners who agree and who support this collective approach. Already, ALC has brought on board some 20 early collaborators, as diverse as Fei Siong, Singapore Academy of Law, Singapore Polytechnic.

6. These collaborators are trying out new ideas in different locations and settings concurrently. This allows for a more thorough and realistic testing process, so that we see what happens when the rubber hits the road, as the saying goes.

7. The working tracks that have been kicked off hold so much promise. The first track is on "future-oriented pedagogies". So, what can the future look like? Well, in the domain of advanced manufacturing, the concepts of Industry 4.0 are well-established. One I4.0 concept is this notion of hyper-personalisation. I manufacture an insole to fit the exact curve of your sole, for example. Imagine if we can do that for adult learning! Instead of fitting a diverse group of adults, each with different experiences, knowledge level and learning motivation, into a single class, what if we can manufacture a "pedagogy of one" for each individual, borrowing from what Minister Chan said at the recent NUS "FutureWork 2.0" event.

8. The second working track is on "digital capability development for an AI augmented future". Here, I urge our team and our collaborators to set ourselves a very high ambition. We should not just stop at examining how to better prepare people for an AI-rich

workplace, important as that is. We should ask ourselves; how can an AI-rich workplace improve human learning itself. In its games with Lee Sedol, AlphaGo made moves that no human would have done, and Lee Sedol responded brilliantly. Together they raised human understanding of a centuries-old game. So, for example, it is not just about writing better prompts to get better results from ChatGPT or Gemini; it is about training and practising to be clear and precise with your communication, whether with a chatbot or with your human co-workers.

9. The third working track is called “new age business transformation”. Business transformation leads to job redesign which is in turn supported by worker upskilling. This track is therefore an opening for IAL to work with SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)’s sister agency Workforce Singapore who drives job redesign, and to bring in collaborators involved in job transformation. Another source of inspiration is an earlier “Digital Futures of Work” study by IAL and various universities. The study found that when more discretion is given to the worker to decide matters, he is more able to deploy and embrace digital tools. So new age transformation might take the form of bottom up, democratised innovation in the workplace. I hope the Collaboratory will be able to find partners to test out these ideas.

### **IAL’s achievement**

10. Beyond these working tracks, and the individual projects, the most critical role of the Collaboratory is to exercise our muscle to work together, as companies, institutions, researchers, and government agencies; across organisational boundaries and across fields of knowledge. The need for such partnership has never been more urgent.

11. We are all well aware that the labour market is now more dynamic than ever; average time on a job is five years. Technology is ever-present and rapidly progressing. In response, the Government has stepped up the financial support available for every working Singaporean to keep learning. But it will take more than financial support. We

need individuals to seize the opportunities to upskill, we need training institutions and providers to deliver training that meet workplace needs and are tailored to the adult learner, and we need companies to be fully convinced and invested in developing their workforce. By common together to meet these needs as an ecosystem, we will be better able to build the SkillsFuture movement as a social compact for Singaporeans.

12. This is why, on its fifth anniversary, IAL can look back with satisfaction on what it has achieved, but more important, it has to look forward and ready itself for the challenges ahead. Stay ambitious, build your coalition of partners, use your unique perch both as part of a comprehensive university SUSS, and as part of the SSG family. Be the lighthouse to new and better ways to learn, and be the force multiplier in the SkillsFuture movement.

13. Thank you.