

WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR TAN TAI YONG, PRESIDENT, SINGAPORE UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, AT THE OPENING OF THE DIGITAL FUTURES OF WORK GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON 1 NOVEMBER 2023

Mr Tan Kok Yam, Chief Executive of SkillsFuture Singapore, and Council Chairman of the Institute for Adult Learning

His Excellency, Ambassador Juha Markkanen, Ambassador of Finland to Singapore

Ms Jenny Egermark, Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of Sweden

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Global dialogue for an inclusive AI future leveraging research insights

1. Good morning, and a very warm welcome to the Digital Futures of Work Global Conference. The Conference brings together key societal leaders from Singapore and around the world to exchange ideas and insights on a topic that is of significant interest to many of us – the future of work, education and social inclusion in an age of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

2. We find ourselves in a unique era – marked by the emergence of generative AI. Its ability to create, innovate, and understand content in a human-like manner brings to the forefront public discussions on the power of AI technologies to redefine our world. There is wide anticipation of the dramatic changes that AI technologies will bring to industries, jobs and occupations. It is not just technical possibilities that should interest us. Equally important is the profound societal transformations that will accompany AI innovation that must be on the radar of leaders in society. It is a global endeavour not limited to any single country. We must collaboratively facilitate a transition to an AI-driven economy that is productive, inclusive and equitable.

3. We are gathered specially to discuss the findings from a four-year collaborative research programme, the Digital Futures of Work. Supported by SkillsFuture Singapore, the research programme brings four universities in close collaboration to study the impact of AI technologies on work, skills and education at the global scale. It is jointly hosted by Cardiff University and the Institute for Adult Learning, an autonomous institute of the Singapore University of Social Sciences. The University of Bristol and University of Oxford’s Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance are programme partners. The research is supported by SkillsFuture Singapore. The Singapore University of Social Sciences, through the Institute for Adult Learning, is very pleased to have been a co-host of this research programme. The university’s focus is to be a leading institution for social good, harnessing the power of applied lifelong learning to support societal transformations. It is an agenda that cannot be delivered by working alone, but only possible through collaboration with others. The

Institute for Adult Learning, through its mission to advance the capabilities of educators in the adult learning sector, shares the same goal of the powerful use of education to advance societal progress.

4. Taking place from September 2019 to August 2023, the Digital Futures of Work research programme saw a team of 20 social scientists conducting a systematic mixed-method investigation on the direction of AI innovation and the future of work, skills and education across more than 10 digital hubs, including Singapore, Silicon Valley, Seoul and Helsinki. The researchers reached out to the very people who were the closest to the ground when it comes to AI innovation – business leaders, technology consultants, AI scientists and professionals. More than 500 of such leading players provided in-depth insights to the research team. Additionally, quantitative analyses, including the use of big data, were undertaken. I am confident that the research findings that we will be discussing today will introduce thought-provoking perspectives that merit vigorous examination and debate. It is through such discussion and exchange of ideas that we can forge the most effective strategies and policies to harness AI's potential while mitigating any possible pitfalls.

5. In total, we have 250 distinguished speakers, panellists and delegates from the business, technology, education, research, policy and social sectors participating in person at today's conference to discuss the findings. They include participants who have travelled from 10 countries, including Australia, Brunei, Finland, Indonesia, India, Japan, S.Korea, UK, US and Vietnam, to be with us today in person. Many others are joining us virtually, including 3 panel speakers dialing in remotely from Germany, Sweden and Switzerland later this afternoon. The resounding commitment from both our local and global communities to engage in this dialogue serves as a testament to the paramount importance of today's topic to all of us.

6. I am also pleased to acknowledge the presence of our three diplomatic representatives from Finland, Sweden and South Korea. Their presence today underscores the importance of enabling people-to-people collaborations to collectively steer our future collectively.

7. In closing, I would like to thank my counterparts in the respective universities – Cardiff University, University of Bristol and University of Oxford – for the collaboration enjoyed over the last four years. We not only honour the mission of our institutions but also uphold our collective vision of research as a catalyst for social betterment. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedication of the multi-university research team led by Professor Phillip Brown from Cardiff University. I would like to thank SkillsFuture Singapore for supporting this endeavour. As Singapore's national agency enabling learning for life, we hope the research will provide new insights to support Singapore's directions in AI education for a future-ready Singapore.

8. I wish each of you an enriching exchange. May the conversations here guide us toward a future where AI, work, and education are harnessed productively for the benefit of everyone. Thank you.