



SPEECHES/INTERVIEWS

July 03, 2018

Speech by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education, at the ITE Graduation Ceremony 2018, at the Tay Eng Soon Convention Centre

Ms Low Khah Gek, CEO, ITE

Mr Bob Tan, Chairman, ITE

Members of the ITE Board of Governors, Staff, Alumni

Parents and graduands

Ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

1. My heartiest congratulations to all the graduands of 2018. We are here today to celebrate the completion of an important milestone of your life. Whatever the next step of your journey, whether it is further education, National Service, work, or just taking a break for a while, I wish you all the best.

2. Let us also not forget all those who supported you - parents, family members, teachers and friends. They are the pillars of your lives, who have been generous in giving you encouragement and guidance. To the teachers in particular, thank you for your dedication in nurturing our graduands, year after year. Let us put our hands together, to thank all the people who have contributed to your education journey.

TRANSFORMING ITE

3. I have met many ITE graduates over the years. They are proud and grateful for their education here at ITE. They know that what ITE did for them made a huge difference to their lives.

4. From the Minister and senior officials at ITE, to all the staff and teachers at ITE, we all have a responsibility to ensure that ITE continues to help you do well in work and in life. We must constantly strive to make sure every successive batch of graduands leave ITE better than when they enter. It is an endless journey of improvement and doing better for our students.

5. Indeed, this sense of constant improvement has transformed ITE over the years. ITE's pedagogy has also improved over the years – in-tune with industry needs and include authentic elements of the real-world. The three ITE campuses are modern, state-of-the-art, and well-equipped. Foreign delegates who visited ITE were often amazed at how good its infrastructure is. ITE graduates continue to be well regarded and in demand by the job market.

6. So in this spirit of constant improvement – today, let me talk about four areas which ITE will be further improving on.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

7. The first is the quality of education. Skills are not just taught in traditional classroom settings but through experiences. This is a key defining aspect of an ITE education,

8. One key component of experiential learning at ITE is internships and projects, and ITE is investing more time and effort to make these experiences worthwhile and meaningful. This year, ITE will be collaborating with 2,500 companies to offer almost 12,000 internship placements.

9. One student who benefited from internship is Muhammad Shah Indra B Jasni, an ITE graduate who pursued a Nitec and Technical Diploma in Culinary Arts. Indra was the first Singaporean to intern in La Pyramide, a two Michelin-star restaurant in Lyon, France. It was a stressful internship I'm sure. Not quite like Hell's Kitchen, but it is very fast-paced, disciplined and precise.

10. Because of the internship, Indra learnt to be more independent and developed new confidence. Today, he is the owner of Burgs, a halal establishment serving burgers. The education at ITE and his internship experience gave him the courage and skills to start a business. Indra hopes to grow his business and bring it overseas.

EDUCATION AND CAREER GUIDANCE

11. A second major area of improvement is to provide Education and Career Guidance (ECG) to all our students. This is a continuous effort through every student's educational journey. In the secondary schools, the focus is on self-awareness and exploration of possible pathways available to you.

12. When you progressed to ITE, you would have attended classes on self-discovery, job preparatory workshops, and sharing sessions by alumni or industry representatives. You will learn to use the MySkillsFuture portal. Your lecturers and ECG Counsellors in ITE are also resources you can turn to. They are all here to help you figure out which path to take.

13. But at the end of the day, you must take ownership of your learning journey, put in the hard work to seize opportunities and develop yourself.

ADMISSION POLICY

14. Third, we are also transforming the approach to admission at ITE. Throughout the education system we are trying to reduce the over-emphasis on academic grades and chasing of marks. I believe that this is especially important for applied learning pathways, like ITE, because aptitude and interests are important motivations in the pursuit of a craft or vocation. Academic grades cannot be the only yardstick.

15. That is why we launched the ITE Early Admissions Exercise (EAE) last year, to allow secondary school and Nitec students apply for Nitec or Higher Nitec courses based on their demonstrated interests and aptitudes. The response from this first exercise has been encouraging.

16. Jason Toh Jia Xian is a student who has entered ITE via EAE. He applied for the Nitec in Digital Audio & Video Production course as he was an enthusiast in photography and audio and video editing since secondary school. He stood out during the EAE interviews because of his portfolio of YouTube videos.

17. Before his Nitec course, Jason partnered a polytechnic student to work on two video projects, where he was both roles of production assistant and filmmaker. He was recently selected to participate in an overseas video project with the Singapore Red Cross to mark the fifth anniversary of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines. What a great honour for a first-year student!

18. Students are more likely to excel when given the opportunity to pursue their interests. We cannot expect all young students to have clear ideas about their future careers and professions, but we must certainly look out for those who have.

19. Hence, from AY2019, we will further strengthen the EAE system at ITE. Today, ITE can admit 15% of its total student intake, and 50% of the intake in each course, under EAE. To give more flexibility to ITE to select and admit students with demonstrated interests and aptitudes, the 50% course level cap will be removed.

20. However, outside of EAE, admission during the Joint Intake Exercise today is largely based on academic grades. This is not ideal.

21. From the December 2018 Joint Intake Exercise, ITE will put emphasis on the assessment of skills and aptitude during the admission process, in addition to considering academic grades. About 50% of the courses will therefore adopt aptitude screening for its applicants.

22. What this means is that there will be more options for students. If you do well at N-levels, your good results will continue to help you enter your preferred course. In addition, you can also go through aptitude screening and interviews, demonstrate your interests and passions, to complement your academic grades and also gain admission to your preferred course.

LIFELONG LEARNING

23. The fourth area of improvement is in continual education and learning. ITE provides you with a foundation, but you must continue to build on it and strive towards mastery. Many of you will want to further your studies, and ITE will remain next to you at every step of the way.

24. The most important effort is the development of the ITE Work-Learn Technical Diploma programme. This is a dedicated work-learn pathway for ITE graduates, a modern dual study apprenticeship programme, leading to a diploma awarded by ITE.

25. The programme is primarily targeted at in-employment ITE graduates, and not just fresh graduates. We have launched four programmes and a total of 114 trainees were enrolled in partnership with 33 companies. ITE is planning to launch another tranche of courses next year.

26. But ITE needs the support of employers to do this. I strongly encourage employers to step forward and invest in our talent. If there is no Work-Learn Technical Diploma for your industry, and you think it is useful, please approach ITE to develop one.

27. This is a newly developed pathway. For many ITE graduands today, if your GPA qualifies you to, you will enrol into full-time polytechnic diploma studies. There is another group of prospective students – older, having worked for a number of years, and now eager to deepen their skills through formal studies.

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30. Today, many enrol in Polytechnic part-time programmes and the polytechnics accept them on the basis of their work experience, even if their past academic results do not meet the minimum entry requirements. However, for full-time programmes, the admission process is still primarily focused on academic results, even though they were attained years ago and does not fully reflect the current eligibility of the adult applicants.

31. Our polytechnics will do more to encourage the flow between working and learning, in the spirit of SkillsFuture. From AY2019, all working adults applying through the Direct Admissions Exercise (DAE) can be evaluated to take into account relevant work experience and performance, in addition to their past academic results. To do this, the polytechnics will ramp up the use of interviews and other holistic assessments in the DAE.

32. Subsequently from AY2020, working adults will also be eligible to apply to the polytechnics via the EAE, which has so far been confined to fresh students. MOE will ensure that sufficient places are provided for this additional segment of applicants.

33. So citing an earlier example of a student who had graduated and will be working for Mediacorp. After working for a few years, she would have work experience. If she is thinking of further studies, she will now have a few choices. Her first choice is to return to ITE to pursue a WLTD. While the programme for media industry is not there yet, I think ITE is committed to rolling one out soon. Option two is that she can also work and enrol into a polytechnic part-time diploma – work in the day and study in the night. Now she has a third option too. Which is after a few years, she can use her ITE

results plus her work experience to submit an application to do a full-time diploma programme. All three are equally good options – depending on needs of applicants.

34. Even as we place greater weight on relevant work experience and performance for polytechnic admissions, we will still ensure that students are able to cope with the academic rigour of the courses they are enrolling into. Our polytechnics will therefore put in place a wider range of assessment tools to ensure that applicants have acquired the prerequisite competencies to cope with the programmes.

35. What this means is that there is no rush for those of you who are interested in further studies. Work in the area that you are trained in, get some relevant experience, and be sure that this is what you want to do. You can come back to the polytechnics later to deepen your skills – whether on a full-time or part-time basis, or you can come back to ITE to get a WLTD.

CONCLUSION

36. Let me conclude. You may be graduating from ITE today, but I urge you to make learning a priority as you pursue your career or your further studies. Learning must be a continuing endeavour. Every step counts.

37. Continuous learning and improvement is also not just about finding better jobs and earning more money.

38. Ultimately, what we are good at doing, and what we do with our expertise, defines who we are. We must put our talents and skills to serve others, provide for our families, contribute to society, and make our home a better place.

39. I am certain that with your ITE education, you stand in good stead, well-prepared for the exciting future ahead. May your success not be defined by grades or wealth, but by your ability to serve the people around you, withstand the hard knocks of life, and becoming a better person.

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