

The new iTalent Solutions Map being launched at Singapore Management University yesterday by (from far right) SkillsFuture Singapore chief executive Ng Cher Pong, Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education Chee Hong Tat, SMU provost Timothy Clark and SMU vice-president of business development Annie Koh.
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More help for SMEs to expand overseas

Schemes to help firms, staff acquire critical skills to operate effectively and avoid pitfalls

Sue-Ann Tan

Smaller firms will get more help to expand overseas under an initiative unveiled yesterday.

The iTalent Solutions Map aims to assist enterprises to identify the critical skills they will need to operate effectively when they venture out of Singapore.

It maps out the different stages a firm encounters when going international and the key capabilities they might require at each stage, including in areas such as culture and language and digitalisation.

The system was developed by SkillsFuture Singapore and the International Trading Institute at Singapore Management University

(SMU) after a year-long study involving 60 industry experts, academia, business owners and employees from over 30 firms based here.

Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Education Chee Hong Tat, outlining the initiative at its launch at SMU, said: "Internationalisation is an important enabler for our companies to scale up and grow. As Asian economies develop, we will see a rise in the number of wealthy and middle-class consumers who will look for quality products and services."

He added: "Expanding abroad will help our companies to widen their customer base and provide them with access to resources, technology and talent."

Mr Chee said that 70 per cent of

local firms surveyed last year have expanded overseas, but that venturing abroad is not easy, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

"When entering new markets, companies may lack the competitive advantage and know-how when their products and services are pitted against established local brands," he said. "They may also be constrained by limited business resources and inadequate knowledge of internationalisation strategies and modes of market entry."

He said the initiative will guide firms on this expansion journey and help them avoid the many pitfalls that may arise. It "will benefit our enterprises, especially our SMEs, by providing information about skills development and equipping their employees with the right skills to take their business overseas".

A complementary initiative – the iSkills Talent Development Pro-

gramme – has also been launched to teach employees these skills.

The programme has its first course in September and each one will run for six months. Participants will undertake projects with guidance from mentors, experience overseas immersion modules and participate in sessions with business and industry leaders.

Staff from 18 SMEs have enrolled in the first run of the course, which was developed by the International Trading Institute at SMU with input from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

SMU provost Timothy Clark said: "All stakeholders must work together to address the urgent need to help Singapore-based firms embrace internationalisation through human capital development."

Food service firm FoodXservices plans to send two employees for the iSkills programme. Its spokesman Neo Kwok Siang said: "We have been looking at going overseas since 2016 and just started finding partners in the United Arab Emirates. But we found it very difficult because we had no knowledge of the logistics and paperwork needed to enter that market and we had no staff trained in this."

He added: "I hope (both employees) will learn in-depth on how to deal with a different culture overseas and on e-commerce."

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