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Speech by Ms Sim Ann, Minister of State, Ministry of Communications and Information & Ministry of Education, at the SMU-SPD Conference on "Education For Inclusive Workspaces", on Tuesday, 3 February 2015, 2.00 pm at the Singapore Management University

Professor Arnoud De Meyer,
President, Singapore Management University

Ms Chia Yong Yong,
President, SPD

Members of the SMU Diversity & Inclusion Committee

Distinguished speakers and guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

1. Thank you for inviting me back to this very meaningful conference organised by the SMU and SPD. This is an excellent platform for students, educators, employers and professionals working with persons with disabilities, to come together to explore how we can all contribute towards an inclusive society that embraces individuals with special needs.
2. One important pillar of society is, of course, education. At the Minister of Education, we are committed to strengthening support for students with special education needs at every stage of their learning journey – in our mainstream schools, special education schools, and institutions of higher learning – to provide them more opportunities to realise their full potential.

3. Last year the MOE announced greater support for students with special needs in the Higher Education sector. Every publicly-funded university, polytechnic and ITE College set up a Disability Support Office, or DSO. The DSOs provide holistic support for students with special educational needs, such as making access arrangements and coordinating staff training on special needs support in the classroom. We also introduced the Special Education Needs Fund for eligible tertiary students with physical and sensory impairments to purchase assistive technology devices and support services that enable them to learn better in class.
4. However, the support and accommodation extended to students with disabilities cannot stop at the institutions of higher learning. The transition from school to the workforce is an important phase in life, and perhaps one of the most daunting for anyone. Our students and graduates with disabilities need strong support when they progress to the workplace – support from employers; support from their colleagues; support from their former schools; and also support from society as a whole. In this regard, I am heartened by the close collaboration between SMU and SPD to help graduating students with SEN find their footing as they enter the workforce. For instance, officers in the DSO provide career guidance to these students, and SPD complements those efforts through job coaching and support when students graduate and move into a working environment.

5. Another positive outcome of the partnership between SMU and SPD is today's conference, "Education for Inclusive Workspaces". SMU and SPD have invited a diverse range of panel speakers, ranging from a specialist in higher education and disabilities; an educator who did not let his disability stop him from building his career; a recent graduate who now champions disability awareness at the workplace; and the CEO of a company that prioritises diversity and inclusiveness. These speakers bring a wide range of expertise and experience in supporting students with special education needs' transition into employment, and I am sure we will all be enriched by their sharing.
6. As we strive towards being a more caring, more compassionate and more inclusive society, I look forward to see more of such collaboration among Government agencies, educational institutions, employers and voluntary welfare organisations, to make learning and employment more accessible to all.
7. I would like to once again congratulate and thank SMU and SPD for putting this conference together, and I hope that this collaboration will inspire many others.
8. I wish you all a fruitful conference this afternoon. Thank you.