

ST education forum to delve into changing role of universities

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Technologies such as artificial intelligence and automation have created new industries, new jobs and new ways of learning and working, and universities have had to recalibrate their curricula and pedagogy to ensure their students are able to adapt and thrive in the new economy.

The compact between institutions of higher education and society also needs to be reviewed, so that they remain a public good

and do not just benefit a select group of individuals.

The rise of transboundary issues and challenges such as climate change, deforestation, rising sea levels and the Covid-19 pandemic also raise questions on a key role of universities – to nurture an educated citizenry. But should it be just about participating in local communities or to nurture global citizens capable of responding to the worldwide challenges?

The Straits Times Education Forum on “The evolving role of universities”, to be held in partnership with Singapore Management University (SMU) on Feb 10, will posit that universities should focus

less on what they are good at, and more on what they are good for.

The hybrid event will be moderated by ST’s Singapore editor Zakir Hussain and will see Education Minister Chan Chun Sing deliver the keynote address.

This will be followed by a panel discussion that will include Mr Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and SMU president Lily Kong.

In an interview with ST, Mr Chan said the rapid changes that society is experiencing will require students to switch from front-loading their education be-

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fore going out to work, to “just-in-time learning”, where learning is available on demand.

Professor Kong said people are rethinking how they learn and work in pandemic times, how they might prosper in a new economy and whether the university experience is still relevant.

She added: “I would make the case that a university remains very relevant in preparing graduates for the new economy – and universities are evolving to do so. But as importantly, universities have a vital civic role. Our responsibility goes beyond preparing graduates for jobs.

“We can nurture engaged citi-

zens and cultivate meaningful involvement in the community, be it through community-based participatory research, volunteer work, or initiatives that support social development.

“I look forward to an expanded discussion about the roles of universities.”

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• The Straits Times Education Forum on “The evolving role of universities” will take place on Feb 10 from 10am to 11.30am. Sign up at str.sg/wgyn by 6pm on Feb 4. Registration is free.

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In an interview with The Straits Times, Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said the rapid changes that society is experiencing will require students to switch from front-loading their education before going out to work, to “just-in-time learning”, where learning is available on demand.
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