



# Brief Remarks by Minister for Education Desmond Lee at the Book Launch for 15th S R Nathan Fellow Professor Lily Kong at the Institute of Policy Studies

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Mr Janadas Devan, Director, Institute of Policy Studies

Professor Lily Kong, 15th S R Nathan Fellow for the Study of Singapore

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

- Good evening.
- I would like, first and foremost, to congratulate Professor Lily Kong on your successful IPS-Nathan lecture series last year, and the launch of your book today. Let me thank you also for your many years of distinguished service to the universities in Singapore, first at NUS, and then at SMU, where you have been President since 2019 and breaking new frontiers. We are fortunate to benefit from your leadership.
- Indeed, your rich insights are drawn from these experiences. You have set out a vision of a world where universities evolve with the times, undertake bold transformative steps to stay relevant and impactful amidst a 100-year human lifespan and become society's brain trusts in conducting groundbreaking research.
- It is an inspiring vision, and one that is very much aligned with ours, at the Ministry of Education. Allow me to add on by sharing three areas where I would be happy to see our Autonomous Universities, or AUs, push the boundaries and frontiers in their core mission of teaching, learning, and research, beyond what is possible today.

## Teaching Beyond Disciplines

- First, our AUs should strive to teach beyond specific disciplines.
- In 1905, Singapore's only higher education institution was a medical college. In the century since, the landscape has grown into a portfolio of six modern, world-class research and applied universities today.
- Through the decades, our AUs' core mission of providing quality education indeed has not changed. But teaching is not the mere delivery of academic content.
- We know that our AUs play a key role in developing our people's potential to create value, to contribute to society, and to solve pressing problems facing us all.
- This is particularly important with the advent of generative AI, which can perform many of the tasks that could previously only be done by people, and even surpass human capacity.
- To prepare our students for an AI-transformed world, our AUs must teach beyond disciplines, by providing opportunities for self-discovery, resilience-building, and interdisciplinary solutioning for real-world challenges.
- Our AUs are actually already doing this.
- For example, NUS has introduced "NUSOne", an initiative that aims to broaden students' access to, and encourage their participation in, a range of out-of-classroom activities. NUS has also formed the new College of Humanities and Sciences and the College of Design and Engineering to promote interdisciplinary education and research.
- SIT's Integrated Work Study Programme allows students to undertake paid employment relevant to their programmes, while developing specific professional competencies and interpersonal skills.

## Learning Beyond Ages

- Second, AUs should inspire learning beyond ages.
- Undergraduate education is not the be-all and end-all. So I fully agree with Prof Kong that higher education should no longer be a phase between the ages of 18 to 25.
- Our universities can and should partner individuals throughout their lives, not just for degree or Master's qualifications, but in honing the skills that we need in order to keep contributing.
- In support of our national SkillsFuture movement, our AUs have expanded the range and scale of their Continuing Education and Training (CET) offerings, and enhanced accessibility for our adult learners.
- AUs also ensure that the curriculum and modality of these programmes suit the needs of adult learners and industry.
- For example, SMU offers the Industry Practice Master of Digital Economy, providing modular stackable pathways for mid-career professionals to develop industry-relevant skills and adapt to the rapidly evolving digital landscape.
- SUSS's Institute of Adult Learning (IAL) is at the forefront of research into andragogy, or the unique characteristics and learning needs of adults.
- I am glad to see that our AUs are building a culture of lifelong learning, and helping to make SkillsFuture more industry-oriented, with greater participation and investment from enterprise.

## Research Beyond Boundaries

- Third, AUs should conduct research beyond boundaries.
- Our universities are places where the best and brightest minds gather, and this provides and produces a wellspring of innovation. AUs do not pursue research for their own sake. Instead, they should do so to address real-world, complex, and multi-faceted issues that both Singapore and the world are facing.
- And this is where our AUs can actively contribute to society.
- For example, the NTU-led Climate Transformation Programme is a multi-institutional effort to translate fundamental research across climate and earth science, ecology, materials science, AI, and humanities and social sciences into real world solutions to mitigate climate change.
- SUTD's Future Communications Research and Development Programme coordinates multidisciplinary research in new-generation communications infrastructure and supports innovative testbeds across local research institutions to strengthen and future-proof our 5G ecosystem.
- The Government will continue to fund a broad range of impactful research done in our AUs to build a more resilient, sustainable, and digital Singapore.

## Concluding Remarks

- Amidst the rapidly evolving higher education landscape, I encourage our AUs to teach beyond disciplines, learn beyond ages, and to conduct research beyond boundaries. At MOE, we will continue to support our AUs as key brain trusts of Singapore and partner you to develop our people's potential to solve the challenges facing our society and the world both today and tomorrow.
- Congratulations once again to IPS and Professor Lily Kong on the launch of this important book. Thank you.

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