DEVELOPING EDUCATION, CAREER GUIDANCE SERVICES IS CRITICAL

Heng calls on companies to do more in workplace training

Offering monetary incentives, grouping firms by sector to offer training could be considered

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AMSTERDAM — To get employers to develop skills of students and employees, the idea of offering monetary incentives could be considered and firms could come together and be grouped by sector, so they could work together to offer training opportunities, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat.

In the Netherlands, firms receive subsidies of up to €2,500 ($84,230) for every apprentice they accept. Vocational institutions and companies are also grouped according to economic sectors, so they work together to offer quality training opportunities. The Dutch and Norwegians also require companies offering traineeships to have training mentors and sectoral organisations also conduct research on labour trends to determine what training to offer.

In Singapore, a review — the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE) — is under way to look at how to better integrate theory and practice at polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs).

Speaking at the end of a study trip to Norway and the Netherlands, Mr Heng called on companies to do more in workplace training. “We are going to see, globally, competition for jobs (getting more severe) ... For our companies to maintain their competitiveness, employers must take on a stronger role in training their staff.”

Mr Heng said incentives for firms to focus more on training could be given through existing schemes such as the Productivity and Innovation Credit, which provides tax deductions and payouts for companies that invest in improving productivity.

To encourage more meaningful internships, employers could be accredited for offering quality programmes and there could be more partnerships with companies that show a good track record in training, he said.

Bringing together firms in the same sector to pool resources could help employees from smaller companies access training at the sectoral level, while also creating a shared skills framework, Mr Heng said. For example, the pre-school sector could have a skills framework linked to job prospects to help teachers receive appropriate training and advance accordingly.

Touching on the ASPIRE recommendations due later this year, Mr Heng said the Ministry of Education would collaborate with the manpower authorities to create continuous learning beyond schools. Longer internships for some courses to authenticate learning would be considered, while the committee is also considering whether prior learning experiences can be assessed first to ease entry into further education, he added.

Underscoring all these changes is the importance of developing education and career guidance services. Adding that it should start from the secondary level for students to make choices on suitable courses, Mr Heng said this should continue in the workforce for employees to access better jobs.

Added Mr Heng: “We got to make sure demand for our graduates from all our educational institutes remains high. Then, ensuring we are able to equip our people with the right skills to be able to access those opportunities remains critical.”

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