

# Skills for the Future

How Singapore's SkillsFuture Movement delivers skills and employment outcomes.

**D**r Gog Soon Joo, Chief Skills Officer at SkillsFuture Singapore, speaks about the country's strategy to drive upskilling and reskilling at scale amidst an environment of accelerating technological change.

## How has Singapore's SkillsFuture Movement evolved since its inception? What can countries looking to upskill their citizens learn from this initiative?

SkillsFuture was launched in 2015 as a national movement to promote lifelong learning and skills development in Singapore. SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) drives and coordinates the implementation of this movement, and we have observed that many more employers and mid-career workers are taking up SSG-supported training. In 2023, about 520,000 individuals and 23,000 employers participated in training programmes supported by SSG.

There has been a noticeable change in attitudes towards lifelong learning among Singaporeans. Increasingly, they are more aware of changing work requirements and the need to upskill. The Institute of Policy Studies 2023 study *Future of Work Singaporeans Want* found that two in three respondents anticipate significant changes in their current roles in the next few years, and three in four respondents recognise the need to upskill to adapt to these changes.

SSG has continued to strengthen collaborations with training providers, employers, and unions to create a wider ecosystem of support for individuals and employers. For example, we partner trade associations and chambers, as well as professional bodies to identify the skills needs in their sector, curate relevant training for their members, and develop skills-based career pathways. A good example would be the Skills Pathway for Cybersecurity that was created in partnership with the Singapore Computer Society.

In recent years, SSG has enhanced its skills intelligence and analytics capabilities by publishing an annual *Skills Demand for the Future Economy* report and regular *SkillsFuture Jobs-Skills Insights* that provide valuable insights into skills demand and growth while identifying key areas for upskilling and reskilling.

In January 2025, we launched the Jobs-Skills Portal—a one-stop platform that is useful to different stakeholders, including enterprises, training providers, and individuals as it provides tools for job-seekers to assess their career mobility and the possible skills pathways to bridge their skills gap to access those jobs. This should be used in conjunction with the MySkillsFuture portal, a one-stop platform for skills development and career planning for individuals. Similarly, the SkillsFuture for Enterprise portal was revamped and launched in August 2024 to provide employers with resources and tools for workforce upskilling and reskilling.





The SkillsFuture Career Transition Programme (SCTP), launched in April 2022, supports mid-career individuals in acquiring industry-relevant skills to improve employability and pivot to new sectors or job roles. This train-and-place programme is available on a part- or full-time format, typically ranging from three to 12 months. SCTP is delivered by Continuing Education and Training Centres and trainees can expect to receive employment facilitation support on top of training.

In yet another initiative, the SkillsFuture Queen Bee programme, industry leaders take on a leading role in championing skills development by providing skills advisory and support to guide organisations, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in identifying and acquiring the skills needed for business transformation.

These policies have translated into concrete initiatives that benefit individuals and businesses. Every Singaporean aged 25 and above receives an initial SkillsFuture Credit of S\$500, which can be used for eligible courses. In 2020, SSG provided a one-time top-up of S\$500, and those aged between 40 and 60 received an additional S\$500. Eligible Singaporeans who turn 40 years old also receive the SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career Support) of S\$4,000 under the SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme.

Feedback on training has been encouraging, with 98 percent of learners reporting better performance at work after undergoing SSG-funded training, and 69 percent agreeing to a large extent.

### **What are the most significant challenges in bridging the skills gap in Singapore today, and how is SkillsFuture addressing them?**

There are significant challenges in bridging skills gaps today. We need to accurately and responsively identify skills needs and develop a common skills language (taxonomy) that is recognised by the ecosystem. We also need to get employers to value and better utilise the skills their workforce possesses and invest in workforce development, particularly for SMEs where manpower cost (time spent away from work due to training) is significant.

In the next five years, the Singapore workforce will be shaped by demographic changes, technological advancements, and economic shifts. The SkillsFuture Movement must therefore enable individuals to continuously upskill and reskill to remain mobile and resilient in a rapidly changing economic and labour market. As the proportion of older workers in the workforce increases, we will also need to consider how to continue upskilling and reskilling efforts throughout a longer productive lifespan or encourage economically inactive persons to return to the workforce.

The SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme was launched in 2024 to provide greater structural support for mid-career Singaporeans aged 40 and above to pursue a substantive skills reboot and stay relevant in a changing economy. This helps meet enterprises' skills and productivity needs, which are evolving at a faster pace to

meet changing business goals amidst accelerating technological advancements. SSG recently announced requirements for training providers to ensure that 40 percent of their enrolment for SSG-funded courses are employer-sponsored as an indication of keeping training industry-relevant.

### **Older workers with substantial financial commitments are apprehensive about career transitions that often require a period of reskilling that comes with reduced incomes and resulting worries. How can this be addressed?**

To address the time constraints faced by individuals when reskilling, especially those with family and work commitments, SSG has worked with training and adult educators to offer flexible learning modes and schedules to meet the needs of working adults. With more than 28,000 courses listed on the MySkillsFuture portal, individuals can find relevant courses which suit their learning needs, be they in-person, hybrid, or online.

SSG also curates modular courses, of which some are stackable and lead towards a full qualification, allowing working adults to complete modular learning at their own pace. There are also online learning options offered through ZillLearn, Gnowbe, NTUC LearningHub, Coursera, and Udemy, which are claimable from an individual's SkillsFuture Credit. Individuals who need advice tailored to their needs can register for SkillsFuture Skills and Training

Advisory services to have one-on-one discussions with Skills Ambassadors on learning and skills development planning.

With the new SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme, eligible individuals will also be able to receive a training allowance when they enrol for full- or part-time courses.

### **What ideal mindset should today's employees and employers embody in the face of technological advancement, the ageing workforce, and a shrinking population?**

Given an ageing workforce and shrinking population, employers need to look beyond qualifications in hiring and developing individuals with the relevant skillsets. This will widen employers' access to talent, as well as increase their productivity and retention rates, when they are seen as employers of choice where workers are recognised and rewarded based on skills.

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Employers should also see technological trends as constructive disruption, and opportunities for growth and transformation. Technology and artificial intelligence can be leveraged for business transformation, and investment in a skilled workforce can make it more productive and versatile in harnessing that technology.

Research shows that SMEs that combine business and people strategies achieve the best performance outcomes. An SSG success story is that of Ang Shu Min, Business Services Lead at Lim Kee, a food manufacturing company specialising in manufacturing and distributing Chinese steamed buns. Ang is on her way to achieving the Workplace Learning Role Badge, which will empower her to take on a wider job scope in her human resources work by implementing impactful workplace learning strategies. She has led Lim Kee through a review and refinement

of its learning policies. As a result, she has created on-the-job training blueprints, developed career pathways, and conducted skills gap analyses. These efforts have led to a 50-percent increase in the staff's learning hours and an 81-percent employee satisfaction rate, driving better business outcomes and long-term success for Lim Kee.

**How should organisations best approach reskilling and upskilling of their existing employees, especially when leveraging SkillsFuture funding?**

First, know where your business is moving towards and identify the skills that you need. Companies can leverage many SSG resources such as *Skills Demand for the Future Economy* reports, *Jobs-Skills Insights* developed by SSG and industry partners, and *Jobs Transformation Maps* developed by Workforce Singapore and sector-relevant agencies.

Second, evaluate your workforce's skills stock and identify the skills gap they face using the Skills Profiling Tool, also known as Skills Profiler. Find the relevant courses that you would like your workers to attend to reskill or upskill in order to close the skills gap. You can visit the course directory available on the SkillsFuture for Business website. Or you could develop workplace learning processes or systems by partnering with the National Centre of Excellence for Workplace Learning (NACE).


Third, pinpoint funding sources that you can tap on, such as the SkillsFuture for Enterprise Credit.

Many companies in Singapore have successfully reskilled and upskilled by leveraging SSG resources. For instance, Commonwealth Concepts, a growing medium-sized enterprise with more than 18 distinct food and beverage brands, wanted to accelerate its business growth and develop the

skills capability of its staff. As part of the SkillsFuture Queen Bee programme, the Commonwealth Concepts team was engaged by Grab to look into their training needs. With help from Grab's Skills Managers, Commonwealth Concepts solidified its training strategy and intervention plan, thus strengthening its learning ecosystem. Commonwealth Concepts will soon start granting learning leave to its employees to attend any SSG-funded training course according to their aspiration and interests. It has also been collaborating with JobKred to use the Skills Profiler tool to map out the skills gap and intervention plan for its employees and is now participating in the NACE Workplace Skills Recognition programme.

In another example, Lim Kee, also a participant of the SkillsFuture Queen Bee Programme, was engaged by supermarket chain Sheng Siong to share insights into the food industry. The workshops conducted by Sheng Siong helped Lim Kee realise that digital transformation is not only about transforming information technology systems, and Lim Kee has since adopted Sheng Siong's People, Process, Technology, Data (PPTD) approach that looks into how processes can be automated where possible while ensuring accuracy. Sheng Siong also invited JobKred to share about the Skills Profiler tool during one of the workshops, which led to Lim Kee adopting the tool. From the third quarter of 2023, Lim Kee and JobKred have been working together to identify the training needs of Lim Kee's employees and improve their skills investment efforts.

**On a more personal note, what are the SkillsFuture courses that you have recently undertaken or been particularly interested in?**

I completed a course related to career coaching in the longevity economy at the National University of Singapore. The course was most helpful in supporting my role as a volunteer career coach. Recently, I started a course in Arts Management with Singapore Management University-Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. I am planning to preserve my late father Gog Sing Hooi's watercolour legacy, hence, the course is an induction into the world of art. 



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