

**SPEECH BY MRS JOSEPHINE TEO, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND  
INFORMATION, AT THE SKILLS IGNITION SG CAREER FAIR  
ON 23 AUGUST 2022, 11.25AM**

Mr Ben King, Country Managing Director, Google Singapore

Graduates, learners, colleagues and friends who are joining us online

1. Thank you for having me on this very important occasion. It is Google's first time organising the Skills Ignition Career Fair. I recall it was just last year – I was newly inducted into the Ministry of Communications and Information – my colleagues were very excited to ask me to take part in the graduation ceremony that Google was organising for its SkillsFuture programme participants. It is certainly great to see another wave of graduates ready to embark on new careers.

**Talent is the centrepiece of digital growth and resilience**

2. Skills Ignition SG was born at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I was at the Ministry of Manpower, together with colleagues in the WSG, SSG, IMDA and several other agencies. We were all very concerned about the potential scarring that economists as well as industry practitioners were warning us about. That is what happens when people are forced to exit work, and because they cannot find anything meaningful to do as a result of the very depressed economic conditions. We were looking for ways to prevent that from happening in Singapore and to sustain employment, to moderate risk of unemployment, and more importantly, to try and make sure that people have a way to keep their skills current; and in fact, against all odds, have themselves emerge stronger from the pandemic, so that as a society, we will all be better off. It was very difficult to imagine doing something like that in the thick of the pandemic, but we certainly had to try.

3. I think we were really fortunate to have within the corporate ecosystems in Singapore like-minded partners who saw themselves as having a long-term future in Singapore and having every interest in ensuring that the talent base here did not get eroded, but instead be built upon. I am very glad that this is one of the programmes that took off in a big way and it has set us on a different path.

4. It has been often said that talent is both the fuel and beneficiary of Singapore's rapid growth in the digital domain. As one of the top talent hubs in the world, the high quality of talent is Singapore's comparative advantage, powered by our education system that is consistently ranked well, compared to international counterparts. Digitalisation has in turn brought exciting job opportunities to the workforce, allowing Singaporeans to build rewarding careers in high-growth areas such as cloud technology, product development, and digital marketing.

5. As with other advanced economies, demand in Singapore for tech talent will very likely continue to outstrip supply. There are many jobs waiting to be filled, and the opportunities will continue to grow. Today, our Digital Economy employs around 216,000 ICT professionals, up

from 180,000 in 2016, outpacing the whole economy's employment growth. It is not uncommon today for many companies in sectors like in healthcare, retail or banking to think strategically about the future and profess themselves to be tech companies.

### **Companies are indispensable in building and expanding Singapore's tech talent pipeline**

6. There is a good reason for that, because so much of what we do is digitised, digitalised and digitally transformed. And that is why the Government, together with industry partners, has continually invested in developing talent. Our top priority is to develop a strong and sustainable pipeline of local talent, as an anchor for our position as a global talent hub, which PM in his National Day Rally speech just two days ago spoke about, and continued to emphasise as being one of the defining comparative advantages that we must build upon. At the same time, the existing workforce needs to have its skills updated. People who are very much important contributors to their respective companies, their respective industries. Upskilling is important to the employers, and is equally important to individuals and their families.

7. To meet the industry's immediate talent needs, our flagship scheme has been IMDA's Tech Skills Accelerator (TeSA). TeSA, as it is known, many of you are familiar with it, has trained more than 12,000 individuals for good tech jobs, and trained another 160,000 in tech skills since 2016. It is very concerted efforts all round.

8. Skills Ignition SG has trained more than 5,200, going above and beyond Google's own talent needs. In training talent, we have always been very mindful that when you curate programmes and ask people to invest their time, the last thing they want is to have incurred cost and time, to learn something that businesses are not interested in, and that prospective employers are not interested in. So, crowding in employers, getting them to help us curate the programmes and tell us what is really useful for the market needs, as is done through Skills Ignition SG, is an important feature of the way we go about training talent in Singapore. We therefore appreciate Google equipping Singaporeans with practical, job-ready skills and helping the ecosystems of hirers including startups as well as SMEs get the talent they need to grow their businesses.

9. I took a tour around the career fair. I was not able to meet with all the prospective employers, but they are very diverse. I saw Fairprice Group, I saw Softwareone, I saw IHiS. Many of these employers may not strike you as tech companies but IHiS has a tech team that is about 3,700 strong. Fairprice has a tech team that is not small either – it is 450 and growing. Many of these companies are here, ready to employ Skills Ignition SG graduates. They told me so yesterday when I met them. They continue to reinforce the message today.

10. Thanks to the strong support from industry, many Singaporeans are able to take part in the growth of our Digital Economy and take their careers to the next level. You already heard from Ramona. I must say one thing. As Minister who had to look after the population portfolio and is now deeply involved in getting women to get back to work after taking time off, it is really a very inspiring story. You go, girl.

11. Another equally inspiring story which I heard was through Jasmina Ali. She is one of the Skills Ignition SG graduates and her journey of transition and growth is no less interesting. She dreamed about joining Google since she was a student. After working six years as a customer service officer, she was courageous enough to take the step of signing up for Skills Ignition SG and embarking on training with the gTech team, or Google's Technical Services team, in digital marketing. The training gave her not only job-relevant skills, but also the confidence to apply for a full-time position at Google. She now works as a Platform Solutions Consultant at Google, applying her experience in customer service and her training at Skills Ignition SG to help marketing agencies understand and use Google products to further expand their own businesses.

### **Conclusion**

12. For the jobseekers participating in the Career Fair today, I hope Jasmina and Ramona's stories provide you with the encouragement to chart your own paths forward. While undergoing further training and switching to a new career can seem daunting, you will certainly have the opportunity to reap the rewards in the form of new skills mastered, connections built, and exciting career opportunities that you might not have dreamed of before.

13. On that note, thank you once again for inviting me. I wish all trainees, jobseekers, as well as the hiring companies a very useful session today. Thank you.