

## Stat board reshuffle under MOE and MOM to oversee skills, jobs

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THE statutory boards handling workforce development and private schools are set to be reorganised by the end of 2016 in an internal government reshuffle that business leaders hope will bring even more coordination and traction to Singapore's drive to encourage lifelong learning and meet industry manpower needs.

The Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and the Council for Private Education (CPE) will be turned into two new statutory boards: SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) and Workforce Singapore (WSG), their parent ministries said on Tuesday, adding that these are tentative names.

SSG, which will be under the Education Ministry, is to take over some of WDA's functions and absorb the CPE. The rest of the current WDA will be reconstituted into the WSG under the Manpower Ministry, the two ministries said in a joint press release.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who is also Coordinating Minister for Economic and Social Policies, said in the statement that SSG would foster a culture of lifelong learning and help to integrate a "whole system of education and training through life", while WSG would help develop a strong Singaporean core in each sector of the economy and help companies to be "manpower-lean while remaining competitive".

The ministries added that SSG will work with schools and training partners to develop "high-quality, industry-relevant" training and would "be ready to undertake a more coordinated approach towards audits and quality assurance for the private

education institutions and adult training centres".

As for WSG, its mission is to help Singaporeans take on quality jobs and careers. It will take over WDA's current work on employment facilitation, career services and industry engagement.

Business leaders largely thought the reorganisation was a good move, saying that the existing WDA played an important role in industry but could get too tied up in addressing pressing needs to spend much time on longer-range planning.

"This will improve coordination and increase the sustained achievement of objectives. It is also very encouraging to note the inclusion of the private education sector in the attainment of Singapore's national objectives," Singapore International Chamber of Commerce chief executive Victor Mills said in an e-mail. "The changes announced today show the triumph of focus and common sense."

Kurt Wee, president of the Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, said by phone that the move spoke of a "through-train thought level in how they plan education beyond the formal years of tertiary education", and could help to change the "mindset and culture" of the general population regarding lifelong learning. The WDA's current role of coordinating training programmes for business sectors and industries was important for firms and this function would hopefully "continue to gain strength" after the reorganisation, he added.

The new statutory boards are expected to be established by end-2016 and in the meantime WDA and CPE will carry out their statutory functions, according to the press release.