



7 March 2018

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **TRANSFORMING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR TO GIVE EVERY CHILD A GOOD START IN LIFE**

*Leveraging innovation, deepening skills and enhancing careers to enable accessible, affordable and quality early childhood services*

1. At the 2018 Committee of Supply debates, the Ministry of Social and Family Development announced new initiatives to transform the early childhood sector to better support young families with children, and to give every child a good start in life. These measures will uplift the early childhood profession and build on the plans announced at the National Day Rally in 2017 to enhance the accessibility, affordability and quality of early childhood services (see [Annex A](#) for details).

2. Among the new initiatives is the Early Childhood Industry Transformation Map (ITM)<sup>1</sup>, a roadmap to steer the early childhood sector towards more innovation and productivity, so as to better cater to rising demand for quality early childhood services. The Ministry will also collaborate with its partners to strengthen the career prospects of their teachers and leaders, and enhance the provision of Mother Tongue Languages (MTL).

#### **Early Childhood Industry Transformation Map (ITM)**

*Ensuring sustainable and quality early childhood services*

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<sup>1</sup> The Early Childhood Industry Transformation Map (ITM) covers one of the two sub-sectors under the Education ITM. The other sub-sector is the Training and Adult Education (TAE) sector. SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) has launched the TAE ITM in February 2018.

3. Currently, there are about 17,000 educators in the early childhood sector. With more dual-income families and working grandparents, as well as growing awareness of the importance of early childhood development, there is rising demand for preschool services, and the sector will require 20,000 early childhood educators by 2020.

4. The Early Childhood ITM encapsulates initiatives co-developed by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), the Association of Early Childhood and Training Services (ASSETS), SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) and preschool operators, to meet the need for quality manpower in a sustainable manner. The ITM sets out three key strategies to support the growth of the sector:

*(I) Innovative services – to better support parents and children*

5. **ECDA will study and introduce innovative services to better meet the needs of parents and children, while easing the transition between different service types.** For example, the Early Years Centres<sup>2</sup> in partnership with Ministry of Education (MOE) Kindergartens is a new service model to meet the needs of more parents for early years services, while ensuring a smoother transition to a nearby MOE Kindergarten (MK).

6. ECDA is also piloting with several preschools the co-sharing of spaces for infants and toddlers, which are typically segregated. This can potentially smoothen the transition for young children across age groups and enable operators to enroll more infants and toddlers, while ensuring that children are adequately supervised and the prevailing regulatory requirements are adhered to.

*(II) Productive processes – to improve and simplify operations*

7. **Work processes are being streamlined to help operators manage costs and allow educators to devote more time to teach and care for our children.** Building on the good progress made in deploying IT solutions to aid day-to-day

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<sup>2</sup> Early Years Centres provide infant and child care services for children aged two months to four years.

processes (e.g. attendance and temperature-taking) in preschools, the Association of Early Childhood and Training Services (ASSETS) and its partners are also piloting the use of shared or centralised services, to help preschool operators better manage costs. This includes catering and bus services, and demand aggregation across different operators for common items such as stationery and learning resources.

*(III) More jobs with a focus on skills – to grow and uplift the profession*

8. **ECDA will expand opportunities for passionate individuals with the right aptitude to join the growing early childhood profession.** We have introduced more flexible forms of training – for example, more on-the-job coaching and shorter classroom-based training for Allied Infant Educators (AIEs) to care for babies. To ensure quality care, the AIEs will be supported and guided by experienced mentors. Through such efforts, we aim to attract more locals, including mid-career professionals, back-to-work mothers and seniors, to the early childhood sector.

### **More attractive career prospects for early childhood professionals**

9. To complement the ITM and ensure that early childhood professionals keep pace with industry needs, ECDA has rolled out various initiatives to support their professional development. These include the Professional Development Programme for Teachers, Educators, and Leaders, as well as the ECDA Fellows scheme. In addition, both pre-service and in-service early childhood professionals can look forward to quality training and professional development at the new National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC), which will be operational from 2019.

10. Building on these efforts, ECDA will work with the **Anchor Operators (AOPs) to enhance career prospects for their early childhood educators, with more progression opportunities and structured career development.** As the AOPs set up more and larger-capacity centres, there will be greater opportunities for teachers with the right aptitude and competencies to take on larger job roles, such as the mentoring of junior teachers, and for leaders to manage a larger centre or a cluster of centres. This will help to enhance the quality of teaching and overall management of early childhood services.

11. Over the next five years, the AOPs will **create some 1,000 more senior professional positions, doubling the current number**. To better prepare their teachers for these senior professional positions, AOPs will develop and manage the careers of their better-performing teachers in a more structured manner. Given that the AOPs employ a significant proportion of early childhood professionals, these efforts will spearhead better prospects for teachers in the entire sector.

12. **In tandem with the deeper skills, larger responsibilities, and more complex job roles required of our early childhood educators today, salaries for the profession are projected to rise**. Over the past three years, median salaries in the sector have grown by around 15%, outpacing the general market which grew by about 8% over the same period. As the preschool sector will continue to expand in the coming years, ECDA expects salary growth for early childhood educators to continue to outpace the general market.

### **Providing a good foundation in Mother Tongue Languages**

13. These initiatives to uplift the early childhood profession and raise the quality of preschools are intended to ensure a good start for our children. In particular, ECDA aims to provide early exposure to and foster a love for the Mother Tongue Languages (MTL) in our children during their preschool years, which will build a strong foundation for bilingual learning.

14. Currently, all 550 AOP centres provide Chinese language education, and MOE provides three MTLs in the MKs. To strengthen efforts to cultivate bilingualism in our children from young, the AOPs will **expand their provision of Malay and Tamil Language education to about 350 of their centres by 2022, almost doubling that of today**. This initiative, together with the expansion to about 50 MKs by 2023, would give parents a much wider range of preschool options that have instruction in their MTL.

15. To ensure quality of MTL teachers and programmes, ECDA will work with the NIEC and MOE to **support the sector with training and resources**. For example,

MOE and ECDA have distributed Big Books and facilitated training for MTL teachers based on the Nurturing Early Learners curriculum framework.

**ISSUED BY**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (ECDA)**

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**ANNEX A**

**KEY MOVES IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR**

In recent years, significant progress has been made to enhance the accessibility, affordability and quality of early childhood services. More than 50,000 full-day preschool places have been added since 2012. Also, the number of families benefitting from means-tested subsidies more than doubled from 2012 to 2017. In addition, the Early Childhood Development Centres Act was enacted in 2017, to raise baseline standards across the sector.

At the 2017 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong outlined key moves to further uplift the EC sector, so as to give every child a good start in life and support families with young children. These include:

- Over 40,000 new full-day preschool places by 2023, including those in the new AOP Early Years Centres and MOE Kindergartens;
- Establishment of the NIEC;
- Uplifting the standing of the profession, with better career prospects and competitive salaries.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:  
EARLY CHILDHOOD INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION MAP**

*Innovative services*

- 1. How many centres currently have shared spaces for infants and toddlers? Would more centres be involved?**

This model is currently piloted in 12 centres under the Anchor Operators. ECDA will review the pilot before deciding whether to extend it to other centres.

- 2. Why was such a co-sharing service model piloted?**

The pilot aims to enhance the utilisation of the infant care spaces, increase the enrolment of infants in the pilot centres, and enhance the transition of infants to child care. The co-sharing of infant and toddler spaces would allow infants to grow in a familiar setting while ensuring that space and regulatory norms are adhered to.

- 3. Would there be overcrowding? How do centres ensure the safety and well-being of the children?**

As with all centres licensed by ECDA, the pilot centres require sufficient trained teachers overseeing the children at all times of the day. The space norms and other regulatory requirements for these age groups of children are also comparable, to ensure that the safety and well-being of children are not compromised. Parents can also be assured of continued service within the same pilot centre for their infants turning 18 months in the infant care bay.

Preliminary feedback from parents and teachers also indicate that the shared spaces made it easier for the infants to transit to toddler class. In turn, this has benefitted parents and teachers in terms of managing children.

*Productivity solutions and processes*

**4. How many centres currently deploy SMART solutions and centralised services?**

Currently about 800 preschools (or almost half of all preschools) have indicated their interest to subscribe to the SMART solutions offered by 4 qualified vendors. About half of these centres have already implemented the SMART solutions in their centres and benefitted from the productivity gains. The vendors will be implementing the SMART solutions in the remaining centres progressively. Also, more than 50 preschools have taken up the centralised meal catering service, and this number is still growing.

**5. Does ECDA intend to implement SMART solutions in all preschools? If so, by when does ECDA intend to do so?**

ECDA encourages preschools to adopt SMART solutions in their centres to help reduce administrative workload, so that teachers can have more quality time to focus on the child's learning and curriculum development, and communicate better with parents, to provide them greater assurance and peace of mind.

Adopting SMART solutions in centres is voluntary, as some preschools have been using their own in-house solutions or other available IT solutions in the market prior to the launch of SMART solutions. Over the past year, ASSETS has been working with partners to further raise awareness and take-up of SMART solutions amongst preschools that have not yet been using technology in their operations.

ECDA will continue to work with our partners to design and encourage the take-up of SMART solutions that will help improve productivity in preschools.

*More jobs with a focus on skills*



**6. How many Allied Infant Educators (AIEs) are there so far? Will the AIE training be opened to non-AOP centres?**

There are about 30 AIEs as at end-2017. Currently, the AIE training is only opened to selected AOP centres as it is still in the pilot phase. ECDA will review the scope of the pilot before deciding whether to extend it to other centres.