



# Effective Education for Employment: Focus Group Workshop – Singapore

Sponsored by Edexcel and  
prepared by White Loop

**Jim Playfoot**  
Creative Director, White Loop



# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Summary of workshop discussions</b>	<b>3</b>
The need for a qualification framework	3
Skills development	4
Appropriate workforce behaviours and attitudes	4
Chinese perspective	4
Entrepreneurship and creativity	5
<hr/>	
<b>Vision statements for education in Singapore</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Ideas &amp; action plans</b>	<b>6</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>8</b>

# Effective Education for Employment: Focus Group Workshop



## Introduction

The idea behind the Effective Education for Employment Vision Workshops is simple: bring together a group of well-respected education experts and industry leaders and ask them to develop a vision for the design and implementation of a 21st century education system.

Workshops start with a wide-ranging discussion of key issues, followed by a session to develop vision statements and associated ideas and action plans that might bring about the desired future.

Participants are encouraged to focus on national or regional needs – in this case Singapore – whilst considering the wider global context.

In Singapore the participants were convinced of the need to build more partnerships between industry, regulators and private education providers.

The country is home to an already innovative, well funded education system with an economy built on the high level of skills among its citizens.

## Summary of workshop discussions

See below for a description of the key issues and points raised during the workshop.

The discussion was facilitated by Jim Playfoot, following a brief presentation of the findings from the recently published report: Effective Education for Employment: A Global Perspective.

Two key statements can be drawn from the discussions:

- We need more communication and partnerships between educational stakeholders
- We need more quality control in all sectors of education

and the summary below represents the varied input of participants over the course of the session:

### The need for a qualification framework

- The need to educate industry about the benefits of involvement in qualification development is currently a major barrier. There is a lack of ownership on this issue.
- A real problem in Singapore is the absence of a coordinated qualification framework; this needs to be put in place and lead by industry so that skills developed are transferable across sectors. At the same time this framework needs to ensure that recognition of

prior learning is organised properly.

- As the Singapore Education Trust will now be charged with certifying education providers, they will have to start with a proper framework. The Singaporean Case Trust is not doing this; there is no accreditation of private education, as in the UK. As one participant put it: "The accreditation process at the moment involves just filling out a form. There is no status for accreditation."

### Skills development

- To counter this argument, one participant testified to the existing connection between academia and industry in Singapore. "All the skills that we develop are done through collaboration with industry, Singapore has a pragmatic approach."
- However, many participants were concerned that companies are reluctant to invest in training for their employees.
- This problem was considered particularly acute in developing countries. It was pointed out that many major national corporations set up operations in developing countries because of low labour costs, not because they want to help with development.

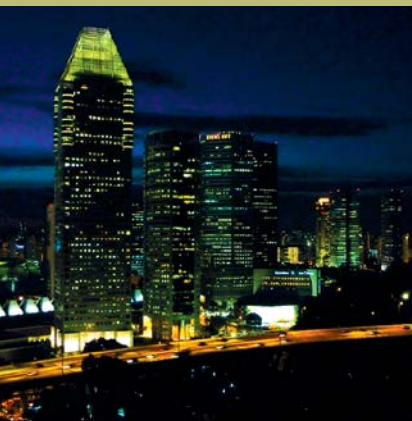
### Appropriate workforce behaviours and attitudes

- The Singaporean Ministry of Education is involved in improving teaching and a lot has been done to improve soft skills. The influence of an Australian model for a new educational approach whereby students have to demonstrate skills and behaviours to a certain level was highlighted. This approach has subsequently been incorporated into the Singaporean Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) certification programme.
- The Singaporean Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports have created a skills base programme and attitudes are also part of this.
- When asked to elaborate on behaviours, participants observed that health and safety indicators should develop industry specific standards.
- A further example of demonstrating an understanding of organisational culture was given as an important consideration when assessing behaviours, but there are too many examples and no definitive consensus around the appropriate behaviours needed by industry and what the associated indicators are that need to be reinforced.
- A concern was expressed that while behaviours can be taught or trained, are they subsequently kept up? Participants stressed necessary behaviours need to be constantly reinforced post formal education and expressed concern that service standards have begun to fall in Singapore over the last two to three years.

### Chinese perspective

The session was attended by a number of experts with a strong knowledge of the Chinese education sector. The following observations were made concerning the differing problems in China concerning behaviours:

- Chinese education is lacking in a concrete values system. One participant pointed to a worrying trend in China; "Every year attitudes and behaviours are getting worse at polytechnic level."



As far as the Chinese market is concerned, this is something which needs to be addressed rapidly. The lack of incentives is a problem as students are not heavily affected if they fail to meet behavioural standards.

- Lack of basic skills sometimes go hand in hand with a lack of understanding of appropriate behaviour, as one participant put it, "In China you have to teach some people how to make a bed."
- Corruption also plays a role at a high level in filtering down bad values to the rest of society.
- We need to track behaviours in the long term. This has been done in several instances but was not maintained. A reward and punishment system has to be in place to reinforce behaviours and combat the lack of entrepreneurship and creativity in China.

### **Entrepreneurship and creativity**

- The Singaporean Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR) fund provides seed funding for young entrepreneurs at student level but small to medium size businesses are not approved for this. However, a number of new initiatives are emerging.
- One participant explained why the issue of promoting creativity is so complicated: "It depends on the definition of creativity and innovation. There are many critical functions within these areas, such as problem solving."
- Furthermore, as a word of warning, cultural/political differences mean "thinking outside the box can lead to jail in some countries".

### **Vision statements for education in Singapore**

Following the discussion of key topics and concerns described above, workshop participants were invited to develop a series of vision statements to capture what a desirable and plausible future for education in India might look like. The statements below were determined as a set of possible ideal scenarios for Singapore.

The statements were agreed upon collectively and then voted on individually.

### **Vision statements (in order of popularity)**

- A credible, valued, private education system, supported by a coherent framework
- Integrated public private partnerships for Effective Education for Employment
- A university education that rewards and values quality of teaching and learning alongside research/publications
- The Singapore Government develops a coordinated partnership with the private education sector
- Involve private education providers in the formation of national education policy
- A level playing field for private education providers with consistent and transparent government policies
- Vocational education is valued equally with academic study



## Ideas and action plans

The attendees were split into two working groups. Each group, working autonomously, were asked to briefly summarise specific actions needed to realise one or more of the vision statements outlined above:

### Group 1

Group 1 chose to elaborate an action plan for the following Vision Statement:

- Integrated public private partnerships for Effective Education for Employment

#### Summary of idea

The Singaporean Government should treat private providers as inclusive educational partners, with recognition of private institutions as fully accredited training providers.

#### Outcomes

- An accredited framework which acknowledges private education, combined with a level playing field for funding across public/private sectors.
- Such a framework would create more choice for students, making Singapore a more appealing place to study for foreign students.
- However, to achieve this all educational stakeholders would be consulted, with a particular need to address the resistance of higher education to a level playing field.

#### Action plan

The group felt that the foundation of partnership between private education providers and the Singaporean Government was a flexible system whereby wherever you take your education it counts against your overall educational achievement record, meaning whatever you've learned isn't wasted. Such a measure was considered vital for both Singapore citizens and immigrants. The Singaporean government should also 'open the doors' to the private education sector and involve them more in policy formation.

In order to achieve such a flexible system, a clear definition of what qualifies as a "credible" qualification needs to be developed. It was felt that a single system of accreditation like NQF would facilitate this.

Maintaining standards is crucial for such a system to work. The group would create a standards body that includes all relevant stakeholders e.g. training providers, trade unions, employers to direct education design, aiding the development of a robust process for accrediting providers. Furthermore, they would instigate a system of course evaluation by Industry.

### Group 2

The working group chose to elaborate a set of actions with purpose of realising/working towards the following Vision Statement:

- A credible, valued, private education system, supported by a coherent framework



### Summary of idea

Edexcel takes the lead in convincing the Singaporean Government of the value of private education through promoting/leveraging its accredited qualifications.

### Outcomes

- In response to what the group saw as a 'disconnect' between government and the country's private education sector, this idea would have the Singaporean Government recognise the private education sector as serving a fully integrated role in national educational development.
- Facilitation of greater trust in private education with a coordinated framework and central control providing further assurance of quality in education delivery.

### Action plan

The group saw a pivotal role for Edexcel to approach the Singaporean Government to begin dialogue on a coherent, comprehensive set of qualifications and an accreditation framework based on its internationally recognised credibility and accredited courses, while working closely with professional associations and business councils.

Subsequently, Edexcel would develop an international qualification framework and share/coordinate this with other private providers in Singapore, thus providing increased legitimacy for courses offered across the private education sector.

Part and parcel of this approach is an increased assurance of quality control for students, coupled with punitive measure for those organisations who fail to meet these standards. Those who don't meet set standards would risk having their licence to offer accredited courses suspended. Should an institution fail to meet required standards, Edexcel would take a central role in ensuring that individual students are not disadvantaged through controlling movement from one institution to another (on a programme specific basis).

The group also suggested a set of measures to aid professional development within Singapore. It was suggested Edexcel could provide a training package to private education providers to aid the quality of educational delivery, specifically, teaching packages customisable for the specific needs of each educational organisation.

To ensure that supply meets demand learning material would be printed locally. Materials would be provided as e-books and e-publishing which can then be printed by a local supplier who has developed a partnership with Pearson. This would also enable Pearson to maintain control of the quality of learning materials in a sustainable manner; materials could be printed on-demand with easier access and less waste of resources. On the demand side, price of materials should accurately reflect the purchasing power of local marketplaces, thus facilitating maximum access to learning resources.



# Appendix



## Venue

Shangri-La hotel  
22 Orange Grove Road  
Singapore

## Facilitators

Jim Playfoot, Creative Director, White Loop  
Will Leonard, Project Director, White Loop

## Participants

Dr John Vong – IFC Resident Adviser, Sacombank  
Mr Renganathan – Manager Quality Assurance (Services) Division  
Spring Singapore  
Mr Leonard Yap – Head Sales & Marketing, Tourism Management  
Institute of Singapore  
Ms Lily Kow – Director Tourism Management Institute of Singapore  
Mr Woon Hon Thin – Vice President Academic Services & Register,  
Raffles Education Corporation  
Prof Graeme Britton – Dean of Science & Technology, Raffles Education  
Corporation  
Mr Breyvan Tan – Director Wissen International Pte Ltd  
Mr Brian Kelly – Training Centre Manager, Petrofac Training  
Ms Lee Hean – Principal, Beacon School of Technology  
Me Nabs Naidu – Chief Operating Officer, AEC Edu Group  
Mr John Lee – Managing Director, Tyndale Education Group  
Mr AW York Bin – Deputy CEO, Institute of Technical Education.