



< [SPEECHES](#)

Speech by Minister for Education, Mr Chan Chun Sing, at the Virtual Singapore Teaching and Academic Research Talent Scheme (START) Award Ceremony

Published Date: 27 September 2021 04:00 PM | [News, Speeches](#)

University Presidents and Provosts,

Colleagues, Award Recipients and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you.

1. Let me start by first congratulating all 25 candidates who are receiving your award under the Singapore Teaching and Academic Research Talent Scheme or START. Congratulations also to your family members and loved ones who are here with us today, and who have been supporting you throughout this journey.
2. Given the current COVID-19 situation, we are not having an in-person award ceremony but I am glad that we are still able to connect virtually.

A Changing World Post-COVID-19

3. COVID-19 has accelerated many changes in terms of societal, economic and technological trends. Today, I will share three challenges that I think Singapore will face in a post-COVID-19 world over the medium to long-term:
 - a. First, how should we allocate finite resources, and build consensus around necessary trade-offs, as the diversity of needs and aspirations of our population continue to grow?

- b. Second, how do we forge common ground and a collective identity from our diverse roots, in the face of ideological pulls and competing ideas from across the entire world?
- c. Third, how can we build a fair and caring society in a hyper-competitive globalised world that exacerbates inequities between groups of different social backgrounds and starting points in life?

Role of Our Academics

- 4. For the autonomous universities (AUs) to be successful and world-class, we need to build a strong talent community with complementary skillsets in research, teaching and leadership. Our academics in the AUs will play a significant role in these areas to address our challenges in our economy and society.
- 5. As future academics, you have important roles to play:
 - a. First, in tackling some of the challenges that I have mentioned above that are confronting Singapore through your research.
 - b. Second, in preparing our students to thrive in a dynamic and complex post-pandemic world by equipping them with transferable skills across disciplines.
 - c. Third, in contributing to the building up of the leadership pipeline for the AUs.

Research

- 6. First, let me talk about Research. This is a key area that will help us to overcome or even pre-empt some of our challenges through the generation of new insights, ideas and solutions. COVID-19 has also highlighted how critical it is for us to have interdisciplinary research where collaborations across different disciplines enable us to solve complex problems. The AUs have also been placing greater emphasis on this and have launched programmes focusing on interdisciplinary research.
- 7. For instance, NUS has launched a research programme and fund to put together 100 cross-faculty teams in five years, with the aim of getting 20 new projects running every year. For its part, NTU has launched a five-year plan detailing goals in education and research which aims to support interdisciplinary research to address global challenges and find ways to accelerate innovation from research discoveries.

Education

- 8. Let me now move on to Education. As academics in our national universities, you also have a major role in educating our students to prepare them for a dynamic and complex post-pandemic world marked by uncertainty and fast-shifting trends. Our students need to be prepared for these future challenges and be able to embrace interdisciplinary learning to solve

real-world complex problems and pivot readily to new growth areas. They will need to continue to adapt, be able to seize opportunities quickly, apply skills and knowledge in changing environments and have the ability to unlearn and relearn new skills throughout their working life.

9. Moving forward, interdisciplinary education, in particular, will be especially important to ensure our students are well-equipped for the future economy. To enhance interdisciplinary learning, the AUs have broadened their curriculum and increased inter-disciplinarity in their curricula. For instance, SMU's Core Curriculum allows students to choose from more than 300 different second major combinations across the entire university and more than 20 double degree combinations. SMU has also been continually innovating to offer new interdisciplinary offerings.

Leadership

10. Finally, aside from having good researchers and educators, we will also need astute leaders in our universities who are reputable academics with excellent administration skills and a firm commitment to public service - this is the essence of the leadership that we need. As the AUs are our national institutions, it is essential that we have a strong Singaporean core of leaders who understand the local context well to lead with a dedicated sense of mission and purpose.

11. Given the multiple roles that our academics collectively play, we will need to build a strong faculty with diverse experiences and expertise who can complement one another. We should continue to embrace diversity and harness the strengths of each and every one and continue to strengthen the different pathways for academics to grow and progress in and ensure that the academics will be recognised and rewarded for their contributions on the different pathways, be it teaching, research or leadership.

12. Beyond the tenure track, the AUs have developed other tracks, such as the educator track to cater to academics with the passion to teach, and the practice track for those who bring expertise from industry. Academics on the educator track are recognised for their teaching excellence and educational contributions, while those on the practice track bring their professional skills and real-world knowledge and experiences from the industry. The AUs will continue to review these tracks to help develop our academics to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations. For instance, NUS has been reviewing their educator track to ensure that it provides a clear and well-articulated pathway for career advancement and progression to Full Professor with tenure.

Building a Strong Singaporean Core in Our AUs

13. The establishment of START is part of our efforts to achieve the above to strengthen this pipeline of Singaporean academic and leadership talent at the AUs.

14. Since the establishment of START in 2015, over the past six years, we have supported 137 START scholars from 30 disciplines which include STEM disciplines such as Engineering, Sciences, Medicine and Dentistry and the Social Science and Humanities (SSH) disciplines such as History, Geography, Law, Economics and Sociology, to name a few.

15. With START, we aim to continue to provide opportunities for Singaporeans who are interested in pursuing academia as a career and to groom talented academics, such as our award recipients today, to be future academics and leaders. This year, we have awardees from a wide range of disciplines.

16. We have Dr Huang Yanjie, an awardee of the NUS Overseas Postdoctoral Fellowship, who is pursuing Contemporary Chinese History and Politics at Harvard University. Yanjie's research interest centres on the history of contemporary China's state-society relations.

17. We also have Dr Wang Wenya, an awardee of the NTU Overseas Postdoctoral Fellowship, who is pursuing Artificial Intelligence at the University of Oxford. Wenya is interested in deep learning, logic reasoning and their applications in natural language processing. I look forward to hearing more about their research discoveries in the future. Together, MOE will continue to work with the AUs to nurture aspiring Singaporean academics such as yourselves.

18. Once again, I would like to congratulate all the award recipients and I look forward to your contributions in the coming years. I wish all of you a meaningful and rewarding journey ahead be it in the academic track, research, teaching or leadership. Thank you.



Share this article:



Ministry of Education

[Contact](#) [Feedback](#) [FAQ](#)



[Report Vulnerability](#) [Privacy statement](#) [Terms of use](#) [Sitemap](#)

Last Updated: 27 Sep 2021