

SFIC launches new initiatives to transform Singapore's furniture industry

- Appoints Mr Lee Yi Shyan, MP for East Coast GRC, as advisor
- Unveils new industry blueprint to create “knowledge-based, high value-add industry” via a structured training eco-system and industry-based accreditation system
- Launches new Place-and-Train programme (PTP) to boost skills upgrading and enhance job-matching between employers and matured employees

Singapore, 12 February 2016 –

Celebrating the year of the Monkey with new beginnings, Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC) has announced new measures to transform the Singapore furniture industry to become more productive, more innovative and more manpower-smart. The Council aims to sharpen the industry's competitive edge by enhancing manpower through a new capabilities development blueprint and a new talent training programme for matured workers by equipping them with new knowledge and skills to better match them with market demands and expectations.

The Council made these announcements at today's annual Chinese New Year luncheon for industry members. The luncheon was graced by Guest of Honor - Mr Lee Yi Shyan, Member of Parliament (MP) for East Coast GRC and former Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade & Industry. Mr Lee was also recently appointed as Advisor to SFIC.

Welcoming Mr Lee as the Council's new advisor, Mr Ernie Koh, SFIC's President, said, “Mr Lee's extensive experience in government ministries, particularly in the area of trade and industry, his deep understanding of local SMEs, and wide business network in Singapore and the region will prove to be a valued asset that SFIC can tap on.

“He will advise SFIC on strategic directions and issues relating to the further development of the Singapore furniture industry. He will also support SFIC to further strengthen working relationships with related government and trade agencies.”

“The furniture industry has witnessed a credible growth of 7.4% from 2012 to 2015 or as of last year some S\$6.25 billion in sales. Looking ahead, it would be opportune to enhance targeted assistance for local companies, especially SMEs, to strengthen their capabilities and explore overseas markets to reap benefits from the Asean Economic Community (AEC) and the various multilateral treaties and tax agreements signed between Singapore and its global trading partners. The transformation of the furniture industry now is timely as we can take advantage of the current softer market conditions to review and revitalize for future growth,” said Mr Lee.

Capabilities Development Roadmap: New initiatives for structured training ecosystem and industry accreditation

As part of SFIC's plan to transform the industry, the Council has unveiled a new blueprint to carry out a three-year capabilities building roadmap for the furniture industry. The blueprint will help SFIC and its stakeholders identify future markets, and implement capabilities-building initiatives to identify and meet future market needs. New capabilities will have to be developed to leverage on new technologies and materials to produce innovative, cost-competitive and quality furniture that fulfill specific consumer needs.

One of the cornerstones of the new industry blueprint is the development of talent with the right skillsets to enhance inter- and intra-industry mobility.

A multi-pronged and integrated approach in the building of a new training ecosystem for the specific needs of the industry will include industry accreditation of relevant skillsets and the upgrading of the furniture industry's standards as a whole.

Said Mr Koh, "These initiatives are essential for the industry to remain competitive and sustainable. While the furniture industry continues to enjoy positive growth, it also faces significant challenges from pricing pressures, external competition and the lack of skilled talents. The furniture industry, which has gone beyond just carpentry, is also evolving. The industry now encompasses design, manufacturing and sales/retail.

"We need our growth model to go beyond traditional silos to ensure long-term sustainability. One of the key pillars to strengthen is manpower. So, our new thrust for the industry will be to chart an industry-wide capabilities development roadmap that allows us to build the talent across different age groups and from different industry backgrounds to not only serve our industry today, but also make us future-ready."

The proposed training ecosystem will cater to all individuals, including industry incumbents, fresh graduates or mid-career switchers. It will open up an opportunity for these individuals to build and enhance their skills. It also aims to attract younger individuals into the industry, to help develop and retain a strong Singaporean core.

The training ecosystem, with courses to train individuals for emerging trends, will be a two-tiered system, comprising a basic and a specialised tier. The basic tier provides a platform to unify capabilities standards across the industry, serving as a foundation for both fresh graduates and mid-career switchers. The specialised tier will provide opportunities for the workforce to develop their interests and competencies at a higher level.

To facilitate knowledge-sharing and understanding among the different industry key stakeholders, the specialised courses will be broad-ranging, covering technical, production, design and transferrable skills.

The SFIC will work very closely with DesignSingapore Council, International Enterprise Singapore, SPRING Singapore, National Trades Union Congress' e2i

(Employment and Employability Institute), Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and other related agencies to roll out the Capabilities Development roadmap. SFIC's training arm, SFIC Institute, will be a major partner for the training courses at its Yishun campus.

Accreditation

In addition to the structured training ecosystem, the industry will set up its own accreditation scheme to maintain and improve quality standards. The proposed scheme will cover capability certification at the individual level, and a quality- mark accreditation at the company level.

Accreditations will be conducted for both the basic and specialised tier. Individuals will be awarded the accreditation after completion of the basic tier courses offered by SFIC.

Accreditation for the specialised tier will be awarded to individuals who have completed the basic and specialised training courses and have relevant working experience in their chosen area of specialisation. These accredited specialists will be eligible to offer consultation services in their areas of specialisation and join a network of experts in Singapore's furniture industry.

Place and Train programme (PTP) for Matured Employees

SFIC also unveiled a new Place-and-Train Programme for Matured Workers in the Singapore's furniture industry. The programme will serve to boost employment of matured workers as well as help them acquire new skills to meet the needs of the increasingly sophisticated furniture industry.

To be administered by SFIC Institute, the programme targets local matured workers aged above 40 years old, who are new hires and may previously be displaced workers or mid-career switchers.

Companies can hire and place these matured workers into jobs such as project coordinators, administrators or other management to mid level management roles

SFIC Institute will implement customized training programmes to train these matured employees to sharpen their skills and re-skill them, ensuring they fit well into their new roles.

The training programme, to take place after the placement of these workers in participating companies.

The training hours for the training programme are 244 hours.

The trainee's course fees and salaries will be fully borne by the employers, with funding support from the National Trades Union Congress' e2i (Employment and Employability Institute) and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) to encourage employers to hire more locals.

The training course will start from the second quarter of 2016.

To register for the training courses or for more information, candidates can contact SFIC Institute at 6496 9451/8 or email to enquiry@sficinstitute.com.

About Singapore Furniture Industries Council (SFIC)

Singapore Furniture Industries Council was established in 1981 as the official representative body of Singapore's furniture and furnishings industry. Its membership comprises furniture manufacturers, interior fit-out specialists, retailers, designers, as well as furnishings and materials suppliers. Currently, the council represents 95% of established furniture manufacturers in Singapore, of whom 65% have subsidiary manufacturing plants in various countries across the region, including China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

SFIC's primary role is to promote the interests of its members and of the Singapore furniture and furnishings industry. For 35 years, SFIC has helped its members to adapt to changes in the business environment by introducing trade, talent, design development and business innovation activities, as well as upgrading business capabilities. Revolving around SFIC's 3i strategic framework – Improve, Innovate, and Integrate, all of the Council's programmes aim to grow the local furniture and furnishings industry and ultimately, to strengthen the 'Singapore brand' globally.

Visit www.singaporefurniture.com for more information.

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