

**PRE-RECORDED SPEECH BY MR EDWIN TONG, MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
COMMUNITY AND YOUTH & SECOND MINISTER FOR LAW, AT THE SOTA
E-AWARDS DAY 2022 ON 19 MAY 2022 AT 8PM**

Introduction

Mr Loh Lik Peng, Chairman, and Board Members of School of the Arts (SOTA)

Mrs Mary Seah, Principal, SOTA

Teachers and staff,

Parents and students,

Distinguished guests,

- 1 It is my pleasure to be part of this year's virtual SOTA Awards Day.
- 2 My heartiest congratulations to all award recipients and graduates!
 - a. We are proud of the passion and determination that you have demonstrated, to achieve what you have thus far
 - b. We also look forward to the exciting journey that you will have ahead of you.

Appreciation to supporters

- 3 As we celebrate our SOTA graduates' and students' accomplishments, I would like to give special thanks to the many who have contributed towards their achievements. It takes a whole village to nurture our young people, and many of you have been instrumental in their journey to success.

- a.—Special thanks to the parents for your support of your children’s pursuit in the arts.
- b. My thanks and appreciation to the school leaders, faculty, and staff members of SOTA for your devotion to nurturing the future generation.
 - i. An important, but not the only, indication of this is the good academic results achieved by SOTA students last year.
 - ii. All 156 SOTA students who sat for the IB examinations in 2021 passed. And those in the diploma programme obtained an average score of 41.1 points, with more than half scoring 42 points and above. This is the highest average score obtained by SOTA, an achievement only possible with the continuous dedication by the school over time.
- c. I would also like to express my appreciation to the donors and patrons of SOTA, for your generosity and support for the school all these years.
 - i. Your contributions have helped ensure that every student deserving of a place in SOTA, has been able to benefit from an integrated arts education.

Pursuing multiple pathways and achieving artistic excellence

- 4 In my engagements with SOTA students, they have demonstrated confidence, creativity, and maturity.
 - a. Many are also well-rounded individuals who pursue their artistic dreams while balancing their academics.
- 5 Many SOTA graduates have also gone on to chart their own paths, and done well.

- b. Film graduate Brian Ko from the Class of 2019 was conferred the 2021 UOB Most Promising Artist of the Year (Singapore) Award in the Emerging Artist Category and will be pursuing his studies at the National University of Singapore, College of Humanities & Sciences.
 - c. Visual Arts graduate, Lau Tse Xuan from the Class of 2018 was awarded the Prize for Excellence by The TAKIFUJI Art Award scholarship and is pursuing Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts.
- 6 We will continue to support the aspirations of our budding artists and creatives, including on the global stage.
 - a. Having attended the opening of the Singapore Pavilion at the Venice Biennale last month, I look forward to seeing one of our own SOTA graduates represent Singapore at such prestigious international platforms in the future.

Opportunities beyond COVID-19

- 7 These are extraordinary times for our graduates. Over the last two years, COVID-19 has presented many challenges to all of us, not least the graduates, teachers, and parents, but also to the broader arts and culture sector.
 - a. For SOTA, many in-person school activities such as students' showcases were affected by COVID restrictions.
 - b. For the broader sector, our arts practitioners had to adapt and work within the safe management measures (SMMs), for example by pivoting to digital platforms to reach more audiences.
- 8 I would like to applaud the SOTA family – including students, teachers, staff, parents and other stakeholders – for your tenacity and resourcefulness

- a. You have ensured that our students continued to learn in the best possible environment;
 - b. And ensure that they continue to make friends and stay engaged with the community, in such extraordinary times.
- 9 Today, our public health situation is improving, and we have simplified many of our SMMs.
 - a. We have lifted restrictions on the number of performers and crew, including those who can be unmasked, to allow larger productions to take place. Safe distancing between unmasked performers have also been lifted, in line with national guidelines.
 - b. Live performances have resumed in all venues and settings, and more audience members can attend and enjoy the activities.
- 10 Our arts and culture sector is gradually regaining vibrancy, and with it, more opportunities for our graduates to participate, create and engage with others.
 - a. The response of the sector to the challenges of the pandemic has also brought about new and exciting opportunities.
 - b. For example, the accelerated adoption of digitalisation has allowed for fresh possibilities for the sector and we should continue this momentum.

Role of the Arts

- 11 At MCCY, we are committed to growing a vibrant arts and cultural ecosystem, which plays an essential role in our society.

- a. The arts allow us to express our identity as a people;
- b. Create common space to strengthen community bonds;
- c. Engenders a creative economy; and
- d. Enlivens the city where we live, work and play.

Role of SOTA in the Arts Ecosystem

12 As Singapore's only national pre-tertiary arts school, SOTA plays an important role in the arts sector.

- a. It supports MCCY's efforts by providing the younger generation with access and exposure to the arts.
- b. Provides multiple pathways for our artistically inclined youths.
- c. The active involvement of SOTA students and graduates in the arts and cultural landscape helps build a strong ecosystem here in Singapore.

13 I hope you will continue to draw on the multi-disciplinary training you received and contribute to the future of Singapore's art and cultural landscape.

New Arts University

14 The Government is making efforts to ensure that arts sector remain innovative, forward-looking, and provides good and meaningful jobs in the future economy.

- 15 The National Arts Council (NAC) is currently developing the second edition of Our SG Arts Plan, which will chart out the strategic directions for the arts sector over the next 5 years.
- 16 Last year, the Government also announced plans to establish a new university of the arts, through an alliance between NAFA and LASALLE.
- a. The new university will further develop the creative capacity of our youths;
 - b. Facilitate learning and networking opportunities across creative disciplines; and
 - c. Provide industry-relevant training for new and existing artists so that they may continue to contribute to and develop the sector.
- 17 These plans, and others currently in the works, will take some time to develop and pan out.
- a. However, they are clear signals that the Government is committed to the long-term development of the local arts ecosystem.

Conclusion

- 18 To the Class of 2021, we celebrate your achievements, a feat you accomplished amidst the pandemic.
- a. As a cohort, you have demonstrated resilience, grit and determination. In the future, even as you encounter greater challenges of uncertainty, I hope you will continue to aim high and persevere.

- b. Draw on everything you have learnt and developed in SOTA - the skills, the values and all the things you learnt about yourself - and apply that meaningfully as you embark on the journey ahead of you.
- c. And along the way, let us not forget to give back to society.

19 Congratulations once again, and I wish all of you the very best in your future endeavours!