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Institutes of higher learning (IHLs) are ramping up offerings in sustainability, to better prepare Singaporeans for future jobs in the green economy, Education Minister Chan Chun Sing said on Tuesday (March 8).

The institutions will also expand continuing education and training courses for working adults in industries that face a "green transition", he told Parliament during a debate on the Government's sustainability plans.

Outlining how Singapore's IHLs are contributing to the national push for sustainability, through research and education, he said that some of the autonomous universities have developed master plans on their green targets and initiatives.

The polytechnics and universities are working on research in green solutions, said Mr Chan, citing projects by Nanyang Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Nanyang Technological University and the Singapore University of Technology and Design.

In January, Nanyang Polytechnic launched a Sustainability Experience Centre together with Schneider Electric, which specialises in energy and automation digital solutions for efficiency and sustainability. Through the centre, the polytechnic's staff and students will work with 100 small and medium enterprises by 2023, to design and implement energy-efficient initiatives.

Said Mr Chan: "Through projects that they work on with industry, the polytechnics enable local enterprises to reduce their carbon emissions and achieve sustainability goals."

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Likewise, the autonomous universities have delved into sustainability research and development, and are using their own campuses as 'living laboratories' to support national research and talent development efforts, he added.

For example, Nanyang Technological University partnered France's Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission to set up a joint laboratory focusing on research on recycling of electronic waste.

The Singapore University of Technology and Design will be turning its campus in Changi into a testbed for new green technologies and projects for sustainable and smart living. These may include waste management and reducing electricity usage.

Another key role that IHLs play is in equipping Singapore's youth and workforce for the growing green economy, said Mr Chan, noting that a recent report by SkillsFuture Singapore indicated that more than 450 job roles across 17 sectors already require green skills in their job tasks.

"We can expect more new jobs to emerge, and more existing jobs to adopt green practices," he said. "We therefore need to invest in "green upskilling" for our students and workers, so that they can seize new opportunities presented by green growth."

This means refreshing specialised course offerings and launching new programmes, as well as providing a wider proportion of students with some knowledge and skills in sustainability, he said.

"Almost all our institutions include sustainability as a theme within their common curricula for undergraduates," he said, citing Singapore Management University which offers a common module on climate change as part of its core undergraduate curriculum.

To meet demand, the IHLs will ramp up continuing education and training courses for working adults in sectors already facing a "green transition", he said. Currently, the institutions offer more than 100 such courses in areas such as sustainable built environment, green engineering solutions, green finance, and environmental sciences.

In his speech, Mr Chan also said schools have been making progress since last year's announcement of the Eco Stewardship Programme - the Education Ministry's sustainability plan through which it aims to reduce carbon emissions from schools by at least two-thirds by 2030.

An Eco Stewardship Toolkit is in the works, which includes resources to support schools in their sustainability efforts. It will be made available to all schools this year.

The four pilot schools involved in the roll-out of sustainability features - Elias Park Primary School, Mee Toh School, Commonwealth Secondary School and Tampines Secondary School - are in the midst of trialling digital learning resources on carbon footprint and sustainability.

These will also be shared with all schools over time from this year.

Thus far, 33 schools have installed solar panels. About 75 per cent of schools are expected to complete their installation of solar panels by 2025.