

**Speech by Professor Tan Kian Lee, Dean, School of Computing  
at the SoC 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala Dinner  
28 July 2023**

NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye

Fellow Colleagues

Students

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have reached a remarkable milestone this year – 25 years as NUS School of Computing! And I warmly welcome all of you this evening to join us in celebrating this special occasion.

As most of you would know, our humble beginnings take us back to almost 50 years ago when we were a small department at the then Nanyang University. You will see this evolution played out in a short clip later, specially prepared by the organising committee of this gala dinner.

Let me dwell more on the immediate past predecessor of the School of Computing – when we were known as Department of Information Systems and Computer Science, or DISCS; our subsequent transformation to a full-fledged school in 1998; and the path we had forged since then. Like some of you here at the dinner, I am proud to be a graduate from the DISCS era, and I have benefited from its rigorous academic programmes and dedicated professors.

Set up in 1983 under the Faculty of Science, DISCS set out a mission to train undergraduates in the areas of Information Systems and Computer Science, with the curricula and faculty centred on these two areas. Research was also a staple at DISCS, and faculty were encouraged to collaborate and share ideas with one another on strategic projects with major impact, rather than working individually on specialised topics within a narrow domain. To keep itself at the forefront of computing technology and economic needs, DISCS sought valuable inputs from a Local Advisory Committee and an International Review Committee on the overall development of the department.

DISCS gradually advanced to be a leading regional centre for education and research in Information Systems and Computer Science.

We had a great run as DISCS for 15 years. But we cannot afford to remain cocooned in comfort under the auspices of the Science faculty. The world of computing was fast evolving in the 1990s and taking on a new and swift trajectory. To make more headway in computing education and research, it became imperative to form an independent school. This would allow us to consolidate our strengths and offer a more structured approach that would benefit our students and align their needs with the changing landscape of technology.

It was a significant informed undertaking. From curriculum matters to research to faculty recruitment and remuneration, the NUS School of Computing now will be responsible for charting our own vision and directions for growth and success.

It has been an incredible 25-year journey so far.

In 1998, our student enrolment stood at 1,700, but it has more than tripled today. That's how much we have grown in a quarter of a century! We continue to deliver rigorous education, improvising and introducing new programmes over the years, empowering our students with new knowledge and skills to enable them to fulfil their pursuits. I am proud to say that our graduates remain highly sought-after, a testament to our success. We have played an instrumental role in delivering computing education and grooming generations of IT professionals for Singapore over the years and will continue to do so.

Just like during the DISCS period, we continue to keep abreast with the latest trends in technology to remain at the forefront of computing research. From Computational Linguistics and Systems Security, we have progressively moved into novel and more sophisticated areas of research such as Data Science and Business Analytics, Multimedia, Fintech, Robotics, Health Informatics, among other areas. The number of research projects has more than doubled since 2008 – from 160 to almost 350; while research funding saw a six-fold increase – from \$37M in 2008 to \$232M in 2023. This can only be possible through the many collaborations we have forged with the industry

e.g., the SIA-NUS Digital Aviation Corporate Laboratory and the NUS-NCS Joint Laboratory for Cyber Security, which we have established with SIA and NCS Pte Ltd respectively.

As the University moved into inculcating the spirit of enterprise in our community of students and faculty, so did SoC. We set up awards to motivate students, provide incubation facilities and support, and engage the industry for internship opportunities, funding and mentorship. Our students have indeed excelled in this field – Patsnap, a start-up co-founded by an SoC alumnus, was the first NUS-supported unicorn. Others such as Visenze, have created successful enterprises. Perhaps it is worth a mention here that the COVID-19 contact tracing web app, developed for government contact tracers in 2020, originated from the School.

Of course, It wasn't always a smooth ride to get to where we are today, and we had our fair share of challenges. The dot.com crash in the 2000s saw a steep decline in student intake in subsequent years. On the other end of the spectrum, we encountered a sudden strong surge of interest in computing studies in the more recent years, which saw the School ramping up the pace of faculty recruitment, provision of new spaces and facilities to accommodate the increasing student numbers. And in the last three years, we had to grapple with the COVID-19 crisis which caused great disruption in many sectors, one of which is education. All these periodic turbulent waves only serve to make us more resilient as we view these episodes, not as setbacks, but opportunities to further improve ourselves.

To the Industry Advisory Committee; our donors; industry collaborators; and various organisations, our School is most grateful for your assistance in many ways – invaluable advice, funding, partnerships, internships, mentorships, among other areas. Your constant support over the years has contributed to the progress of SoC, enabling us to accomplish our goals in providing quality education, innovative research, entrepreneurship as well as community work.

Last but not the least, we owe much of our success to you – our dedicated “SoC family” of staff, students and alumni. You have played an integral role in our 25-year journey and this milestone is a celebration of your talent, passion, diligence and teamwork. Only with your unwavering commitment to excellence, we will continue to innovate, thrive and assume a vital role in shaping a digital future for all.

As we embark on the next 25 years, I am confident that the legacy we leave behind will prevail in our future endeavours and accomplishments.

In closing, I thank Eng Chye for gracing this special celebratory occasion with us, and all our guests who are here this evening. My heartfelt thanks also to the Organising Committee for their hard work in putting together this event.

Thank you and I wish you an enjoyable evening.