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UOB partners with the Autism Resource Centre to champion an inclusive workplace

Bank redesigns operational roles to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with autism

Singapore, 19 May 2015 – United Overseas Bank Group (UOB) has launched an inclusive employment initiative to offer meaningful career opportunities for people with special needs.

Together with the Autism Resource Centre's (ARC) Employability and Employment Centre, UOB has redesigned work processes, modified its office environment and developed structured training programmes to enable people with autism to work at its Scan Hub operations centre.

Scan Hub is the Bank's nerve centre for the checking, digitisation and archiving of customer documents. Employees at UOB's Scan Hub must possess a sharp eye for detail and a methodical approach – qualities which match the abilities of people with autism.

Ms Susan Hwee, Head of Group Technology and Operations, UOB Group, said UOB's Scan Hub was making a positive difference to the Bank's business and to the lives of its employees.

"When we began our discussions with the ARC on how we could redesign particular clerical roles to create employment opportunities for people with autism, we really were charting new ground. By focusing on an individual's abilities and contribution in the workplace, we began our initiative with the firm belief that we were creating meaningful, long-term employment opportunities that would benefit both the Bank and the people we employ," Ms Hwee said.

Today, people with autism represent 30 per cent of all employees at the UOB Scan Hub.

Inclusive employment makes good business sense

UOB partnered with the ARC to establish selection, onboarding, training and counseling services to help ensure its new employees would succeed. As part of this, UOB has assigned work buddies to each employee to help them adjust to the working environment. While the ARC has placed job coaches onsite to guide the new employees on their daily work requirements and to train supervisors on how best to manage with people with autism.

NEWS RELEASE

Since redesigning the roles and hiring the team at UOB Scan Hub, employee turnover has decreased and overall work productivity has increased.

Ms Denise Phua, President of ARC and Mayor of Central Singapore District, said UOB is leading the way when it comes to creating an inclusive business environment in Singapore.

“ARC is delighted to collaborate with a leading financial institution such as UOB to help people with special needs become contributing and productive members of our society. The systematic and structured way in which UOB trains, places and coaches employees with special needs promises a sustainable and scalable employment model for other employers. The fruitful partnership has a positive impact on our country’s employment landscape. The special-needs workforce can now be more optimally tapped upon and I look forward to seeing more companies following UOB’s footsteps to become an inclusive employer,” said Ms Phua.

UOB will continue to invest in developing training and career progression plans to help employees with special needs take on more responsibilities at the Scan Hub. UOB will also tap on SG Enable’s Open Door programme – an initiative that provides employers with financial support to organise apprenticeships, to re-design jobs and to modify the workplace when they hire people with special needs. SG Enable is an agency which seeks to empower people with special needs and to enhance their employability options.

Ms Ku Geok Boon, Chief Executive Officer of SG Enable, said the agency is excited to partner with UOB to provide more employment opportunities for people with special needs.

“This programme has demonstrated UOB’s leadership as an inclusive employer. By focusing on each person’s abilities, the Bank has shown how companies can achieve higher business productivity and strengthen the team culture. We look forward to working together with UOB as we continue on our journey to build an inclusive Singapore,” Ms Ku said.

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About United Overseas Bank

United Overseas Bank Limited (UOB) is a leading bank in Asia with a global network of more than 500 offices in 19 countries and territories in Asia Pacific, Western Europe and North America. Since its incorporation in 1935, UOB has grown organically through a series of strategic acquisitions. UOB is rated among the world’s top banks: AA1 by Moody’s and AA- by Standard & Poor’s and Fitch Ratings respectively.

In Asia, UOB operates through its head office in Singapore and banking subsidiaries in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines, as well as branches and representative offices.

NEWS RELEASE

UOB plays an active role in the community, focusing on art, children and education. It has, over more than three decades, held the longest-running art competition in Singapore, the UOB Painting of the Year, which has since been extended across Southeast Asia. In recognition of its contributions to the arts, UOB was conferred the Singapore National Arts Council's Distinguished Patron of the Arts Award for the tenth consecutive year in 2014. UOB also encourages its employees across the region to be involved in its regular volunteer activities. This includes the annual UOB Heartbeat Run which is held in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

About Autism Resource Centre

Autism Resource Centre (Singapore), www.autism.org.sg, was setup in 1999 as a Charity to help individuals with autism lead meaningful and independent lives via the following services:

- WeCAN Early Intervention Programme (EIP) provides direct intervention to young children with autism 6 years and below. It is the first internationally accredited EIP in Asia by the National Autistic Society, United Kingdom since 2008.
- Pathlight School is the first autism-focused school offering Singapore's mainstream academic curriculum together with life readiness skills for children aged 7 to 21 years old.
- Employability and Employment Centre serves to equip, place and support adults with autism to be contributing members of the workforce. The programme has served more than 170 clients and placed 60 clients in open employment since its inception.
- Autism Intervention, Training and Consultancy empowers and enskills professionals and caregivers to better support individuals with autism.

About SG Enable

Set up by MSF in July 2013, SG Enable is an agency dedicated to enabling persons with disabilities and building an inclusive society. It seeks to provide comprehensive support to persons with disabilities across different life stages.

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