

SkillsFuture scam: Key syndicate member sentenced to jail for 11 years and one month



In the \$40 million scam, the syndicate used nine shell companies to submit bogus SkillsFuture claims. PHOTO: ST FILE



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SINGAPORE - Another key member of a syndicate which duped SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) into wrongfully disbursing more than \$40 million was dealt with on Wednesday (Aug 18).

Andy Quek Sze Leng, 41, was sentenced to jail for 11 years and one month for his role in the largest case of fraud perpetrated against a public institution in Singapore.

The former Grab and Uber driver had earlier pleaded guilty to 21 charges which included cheating and laundering the criminal proceeds.

Another 49 charges, including for similar offences, were taken into consideration during sentencing by District Judge Chay Yuen Fatt.

The scam saw the syndicate use nine shell companies to submit bogus SkillsFuture claims to SSG.

Under the scheme, a Singapore business that sends its employees for skills-training courses with registered training providers can apply for a subsidy from SSG, if certain conditions are met.

This means a portion of the total course fee payable by the business to the training provider will come from the Government. Depending on the claim method used, subsidies are paid to either the training provider or the employer.

Between May and October 2017, the shell companies submitted a total of 8,381 fraudulent course fee grant applications and a corresponding 8,391 claims to SSG.

Quek joined the syndicate in July 2017. In exchange for money, he accepted the offer by another member, Sim Soon Lee, now 45, to register himself as a director of three of the companies that purportedly offered training.

Between August and October 2017, Quek assisted the syndicate in laundering over \$19 million of the criminal proceeds.

Sim had asked him to sign cheques issued by the three shell companies and withdraw cash from the bank accounts which held the disbursements from SSG.

Quek received more than \$1 million in commission from Sim and has not made any restitution.

He later left the country for China with Sim on Oct 20, 2017.

In early November 2017, he was informed by his brother, Roger Quek Si Guang, that the police were looking for him. But he chose to remain in China.

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Quek was extradited from Hong Kong on Aug 29, 2018 after he failed to renew his Singapore passport there. He had tried to get help from Sim but was unable to contact him.

He was arrested by the Commercial Affairs Department the same day.

On Wednesday, District Judge Chay backdated Quek's jail term to Aug 31, 2018, when he was first remanded.

Roger Quek was jailed for 3½ years in February 2019 for his involvement in the scam.

Two other key members of the syndicate were dealt with earlier this week.

Ng Cheng Kwee, 45, was sentenced to jail for 17 years and nine months, while Lee Lai Leng, 43, was sentenced to 14 years' jail.

The cases for Sim and another syndicate member, David Lim Wee Hong, 42, are still pending.

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