One in 2 students in Singapore to get subsidised degrees by 2020

By Joy Fang

C OME 2020, one in two students from each cohort is expected to get either a full-time or a part-time government-subsidised degree education. That is, with the introduction of Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and SIM University (UniSIM) as Singapore’s fifth and sixth universities.

SIT, which will become Singapore’s fifth autonomous university, plans to strengthen its industry orientation through the Cooperative Education Programme to integrate meaningful work experience with academic course requirements. SIT will also start awarding its own degrees. It currently offers only degree programmes from its overseas partner universities. As for UniSIM, it will offer full-time degree programmes for fresh school leavers, as well as working adults. Currently, it offers part-time degree programmes.

The universities provide niche industry-focused offerings that are different from those of the existing four universities, which is vital in this changing education landscape, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

He said at a media briefing that universities here are currently more research-intensive. He pointed out that the ministry has been “very careful (to ensure) that every university should...be distinctive (and) ...there should be a whole spectrum of universities”. Also present was Mr Lawrence Wong, Senior Minister of State for Education and Information, Communications and the Arts, who chaired the Committee on University Education Pathways beyond 2015 (CUEP). Professional, managerial and executive-type jobs are the fastest-growing segment, rising from 27 per cent in 2001 to 32 per cent last year, Mr Wong noted. CUEP’s recommendations were calibrated to ensure that there was no mismatch between the degrees that will be available and the needs of the economy, he said.

“This is because the two universities cater to students with different learning abilities and preferences, he added. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong first made the announcements during his National Day Rally speech on Sunday. He said that 40 per cent of each cohort, or 16,000 students, will get a shot at full-time degree programmes by 2020, up from 27 per cent now, or 13,000 students.

Some 10 per cent of each cohort will also take on part-time degree courses, up from 7 per cent.

SIT president-designate Tan Thiam Soon said he hopes that SIT will become an autonomous university in two years.

He said that the Cooperative Education Programme “can be a very important catalyst in industries such as engineering and science, which need hands-on and high-quality manpower. The work-study programmes will not merely be an internship with limited roles, but an actual job with wages and the chance to work on projects, he noted. Mr Wong added that this “adds value” and will make students more highly sought after. UniSIM president Cheong Hee Kiat said its full-time courses will harness the expertise of those who are working in industry. The university is also considering allowing full-time students to take evening courses which are open to part-time students.

As to when people can expect the new initiatives to be rolled out, Professor Cheong said this would take time. “We need to look at industry...and how we can shape our programmes (to) fit its needs,” he said. joyfang@sph.com.sg

Malaysians top foreign private-property buyers here

By Reiko Wong

MALAYSIA has replaced the Chinese as the largest group of foreign private-property buyers in Singapore, the latest data showed. Sales to home purchasers saw a strong 73 per cent rebound of 261 units in the second quarter of this year from the previous quarter. However, a report released by property firm DTZ yesterday said the number of transactions is still at a low, due to the imposition of the 10 per cent additional buyer’s stamp duty (ABSD) by the Government. Foreign buying made up only about 7 per cent of the total private sales in the second quarter, up slightly from 5 per cent recorded in the first three months of this year.

Malaysians made up 27 per cent of the total number of foreign buyers in the second quarter, purchasing 520 units. The number of transactions by Malaysian buyers rose by about 30 per cent quarter-on-quarter.

Home purchases by Chinese buyers, comparatively, rose by only 18 per cent to 369 units. The proportion of Chinese buyers also fell for a second consecutive quarter to make up just 19 per cent of the total.

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