TWO recent announcements reflect the pace at which our private universities are closing the gap on their public counterparts.

On Feb 18, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed between the People’s Association (PA) and SIM University (UniSIM) to announce Singapore’s first programme leading to a master’s degree in Community Leadership and Social Development (MCLSD).

The graduate diploma will be awarded by the National Community Leadership Institute (NACLI) and the master’s by UniSIM.

Ms Grace Fu, senior minister of state at the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts and the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, said at the signing ceremony: “We will see a new partnership between UniSIM and NACLI—the leadership development arm of the PA—to offer a new master’s degree programme in community leadership and social development.

“This programme will impart the knowledge and skills to respond effectively to rapid social changes in our society and the world. It will offer systematic professional training for those engaged in work related to community leadership and social development.

“They include policymakers, community leaders, civil society actors, social workers, counsellors and unionists.”

Graduates of the course will be equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills in effective and responsive leadership, along with a deeper understanding of society’s complexities.

This development is in line with the PA NACLI Community Leadership Framework, a comprehensive and holistic approach launched in 2011, to develop core leadership competencies in grassroots leaders so that they can fulfil their leadership roles within the community effectively.

The message behind the PA-SIM tie-up is clear: There are areas of study which the public universities may not cover, hence giving study opportunities to those who either miss the admission cut or are not interested in the national courses.

Also, with their flexibility, private universities can introduce and tailor courses to suit the needs of a fast-changing society.

Five days later, on Feb 23, UniSIM announced another MOU, this time between its School of Business and seven leaders in the transport industry—Accenture, Aecom, Motorola Solutions, NCS, ST Electronics’ Large-Scale Systems Group, ST Electronics’ Info-Comm Systems and ST Kinetics.

The seven partners will be corporate affiliates for the Master of Science in Urban Transport Management (UTM) programme.

The UTM programme was the result of collaboration between the Land Transport Authority and UniSIM in 2010. Tapping on LTA’s expertise, the programme aspires to be the premier learning hub for government officials, commercial organisations and professionals in the urban transportation field. The first batch of students will graduate in October.

MEANINGFUL COURSES

Private universities like UniSIM are beginning to provide more meaningful and industry-relevant courses and there is no better testimony to the changing landscape in our tertiary education sector than the stories told by both undergraduates and graduates, as well as their lecturers, in this edition of The New Paper’s GD Guide.

Their stories should motivate some of you to continue chasing your dreams, even if your results today may not have been the ones you had hoped for.

There are many students featured in this Guide who, just like you, struggled in the mainstream schools but found hope in the Private Education Institutions (PEI), and are perfectly happy with their choices.

Indeed, the PEIs have come a long way in establishing themselves as viable alternatives to the mainstream tertiary institutions.

Of course, the hardwork of the Council for Private Education over the past few years helped bring several of them up to par and, in some cases, above par, when compared with some of our public institutions.

And if there is one thing you want to take away from the stories you read here, it is that there is no end to education and upgrading yourself.