

Why a poly education is relevant

Sector has bucked global trend by continuing to grow, says minister

BY LEOW SI WAN

A POLYTECHNIC education will become more relevant and valuable in the next two decades.

At the closing ceremony of the 14th Polytechnic Forum last night – a platform for poly students to discuss current and national issues – Education Minister Ng Eng Hen said the polytechnic sector here has bucked the global trend by continuing to expand.

Addressing 600 invited guests and stu-

dents from the five polytechnics at the Ngee Ann Convention Centre, he said: “We are among the very few countries that have kept the polytechnic sector.

“Countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Hong Kong have either amalgamated their polytechnics with specific universities or converted them to full universities.”

In Singapore, however, about 42 per cent of the Primary 1 cohort go on to enrol at polytechnics, up from just 5 per cent 20 years ago.

Numbers are expected to grow to 45 per cent of the cohort by 2015.

He added that one in three students in Singapore who qualify for junior college opts to attend a polytechnic instead.

Demand from students and employers, he said, is increasing.

Employers describe polytechnic graduates here as “industry-ready the very day they graduate”, Dr Ng said.

He also said that Singapore’s polytechnics show how institutions can be responsive to a changing environment, where employers are looking for more than just



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paper qualifications.

Praising these institutions for forging close links with industry partners, he said that despite a weaker economy in the first half of last year, polytechnic graduates were still highly employable, with nine in 10 finding a job within six months of graduation.

The establishment of the Singapore Institute of Technology, which offers industry-oriented degree courses for those with polytechnic diplomas, he added, would boost the sector further.

Dr Ng also called for polytechnics to invest more in research and development and to look into how to “extract value”

from their huge alumni.

And while polytechnic graduates have proven to be entrepreneurial, they need to “hunt in packs”, especially for opportunities in Asean, India and China.

Reiterating the Government’s commitment to investing in and expanding polytechnics, he said: “We have a first-class polytechnic sector we can be proud of... We will keep it that way.”

The principal of Singapore Polytechnic, Mr Tan Hang Cheong, said: “Moving on, polytechnics must see how they can help students become more innovative and bring more products to the market.

“They should not just have skills but play a bigger role in applied R&D.”

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