

A buoyant career

ASMI-Keppel FELS scholarship holder Ng Lay Kim proves that marine engineering is not for men only

Mike Lee

MARINE engineering might not sound like a typical career choice for women, but Ms Ng Lay Kim is dedicated enough to have taken up an ASMI-Keppel FELS scholarship to pursue this interest.

The 20-year-old is also among the pioneer batch of students admitted to the University of Newcastle upon Tyne's Bachelor of Engineering with honours in marine engineering programme locally through the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

Targeted at growth sectors of the economy, SIT provides industry-focused degree programmes in fields including hospitality, interactive digital media, health sciences, design and engineering and applied sciences in partnership with local polytechnics and reputable overseas universities.

Newcastle University's School of Marine Science and Technology has a history of over 100 years and is the largest school of its kind in Europe.

The ASMI-Keppel FELS scholarship is awarded to students in SIT. It covers tuition fees, an overseas immersion programme, a notebook grant and yearly allowance for two years.

Ms Ng, a graduate of Singapore Polytechnic's marine engineering programme, says she decided to pursue the field after hearing the polytechnic lecturers share their interesting experiences at an open-house event.

"I did not want to be office-bound, and I wanted a job that is hands-on. The very unique work environment is totally different from land," she explains.

After acing her diploma, she went on a cadetship with Wallenius Marine Singapore before embarking on her degree studies.

She was attached to two ships that were designated as car carriers for a period of over eight months, during which she was an understudy to the engineers who maintained the engine and machinery on board.

Ms Ng and a fellow polytechnic classmate were the only two women among a crew of about 20 people.

Thankfully, ship welfare was good, she recalls. Still, the pair had to help carry heavy parts and tools on the job, at times working in dirty environments.

Seasickness and homesickness was an issue at the beginning. Though she was able to call home and access the Internet, there were stretches of days when she saw nothing but the sea.

Nevertheless, the cadetship with Wallenius Marine Singapore helped toughen her up and she got to travel to places as far as China, Korea, Norway, Poland and South America.

Back in Singapore, she then plunged into full-time studies at SIT.

The intensive pace and workload degree programme includes modules such as engineering application, where she had to juggle up to six projects.

The experience has honed her time management skills, she says. The amount of reading and research required is much more than what was expected at the polytechnic level.

Her classmates are a mix of young diploma holders like herself and adults up to their 30s who are sponsored by their companies to upgrade their qualifications to a degree.

For certain common modules, they are joined by schoolmates from the naval architecture and offshore engineering disciplines.

Ms Ng is currently in the United Kingdom on a one-month Overseas Immersion Programme as part of her studies.

The itinerary includes visits to various cities and marine facilities besides immersion in Newcastle University to study from and consult the lecturers in the home campus.

She will begin her second and final year when she returns. She expects to graduate in June next year, after which she will serve a three-year bond with Keppel FELS.

In time, she hopes to explore related fields such as ship production, commissioning, surveying, auditing and management.

She advises those interested in following in her footsteps: "Keep an open mind and grab every op-

portunity that comes along."

Women should not be deterred from entering this field, she adds.

"Be brave to take up the challenge. Experience it for yourself. You will never know if you do not try."

Ms Ng chose marine engineering because she wanted a job that is hands-on and has a unique work environment.
PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



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