A buoyant career

ASMI-Keppler 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. Yet Ms Ng Lay Kim is dedicated enough to have taken up an ASMI-Keppler FELs scholarship to pursue this interest.

The 28-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).

Engaged at growth section of the global shipping industry, the course 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-Keppler FELs scholarship is awarded to students in SIT, a degree in marine engineering, a master’s and PhD programmes in marine engineering, respectively.

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

“I did not want to be office-bound, and I wanted a job that I had to endure. The very unique work environment is totally different from land,” she explained.

After earning her diploma, she went on a placement at Wallenius Wilhelmsen Singapore before embarking on her degree studies.

She was assigned to two ships that were designated as car carriers for a period of eight months, during which she was an under study to the engineers who maintenanced the engine and machinery onboard.

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

Notably, ship welfare was great, she noted. Still, the role 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 sail home and access the internet, there were weeks of days when she saw nothing but the sea.

Nevertheless, the training with Wallenius Wilhelmsen 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 work load 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 diplomas holders like herself and adults up to their 50s who are sponsored by the companies to upgrades their qualifications to a degree.

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

Ms Ng is currently in the United Kingdom on a one-month overseas internship programme as part of her studies.

Her itinerary includes visits to various off-shore marine facilities and an 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 Keppler FELs.

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

She admires those interested in following her footsteps: “Keep an open mind and grab every opportunity that comes along; women should not be deterred from entering this field, she adds. “Be brave; take up the challenge. Experience it for yourself. You will never know if you don’t try.”


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