



SIT popular with polytechnic upgraders

Record **4,000** diploma holders vie for **1,000** places in **17** courses

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SENIOR WRITER

THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which offers niche degree courses with top-ranked overseas universities, is proving to be a hit with the cream of polytechnic upgraders.

A record 4,000 polytechnic diploma holders vied for the 1,000 places which the institute offered this year in 17 courses ranging from naval architecture to culinary arts management.

Last year, 1,500 applied for the 500 places offered.

Most of the applicants, or 95 per cent of them, were polytechnic diploma holders with work experience of one to two years. The rest were A-level holders.

Among the 1,000 who made the cut, one in four – or 25 per cent – had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 and above, which put them among the top 15

per cent of the polytechnic cohort.

Many chose SIT's seven partner institutions, including the University of Manchester, the DigiPen Institute of Technology and the Technical University of Munich, over the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

The new institute was set up in September 2009 to meet the growing demand among polytechnic graduates for a university education.

Back then, only 13 per cent of the annual polytechnic cohort, or about 2,000 students, secured places at one of the three local universities offering full-time degrees. Those who did not land places in the local universities had to take up bank loans or use their parents' savings to head overseas. Others took the private school route.

But with the expansion of university places, 20 per cent of the polytechnic cohort will be able to upgrade to a degree here by 2015.

By then, SIT's annual intake will be 2,000.

SIT president Tan Chin Tiong said the record number of applications signals that it is on the right path with its model of university education.

The institute, which runs the courses on its decentralised campuses in the polytechnics, differs from the other three publicly funded universities by offering niche degrees. Another draw is that its undergraduates are given advanced standing, which allows them to complete their degrees in two years.

The Government foots 75 per cent of the tuition fee, meaning students would need to pay only between \$20,000 and \$27,000 over two years, depending on the course.

But SIT's main selling point, according to Professor Tan, is the high standing of its partner institutions in their fields of specialisation.

"We have been very selective in our choice of partner institutions to ensure that they are among the best. This way, our graduates will have an edge in the job market," he said.

That explains why the 60 places offered in the two engineering courses by the Technical University of Munich were oversubscribed by 13 times. The German science and engineering institution has produced 15 Nobel Prize winners.

SIT's other university partners are just as reputed. The Culinary Institute of America is consistently ranked as the best in the United States. Newcastle University and the University of Manchester are part of the prestigious Russell Group of universities in Britain.

Prof Tan said that despite the higher GPA of the freshmen coming in this year, SIT and its partner institutions would continue to look for more in students than just academic grades. That is why all short-listed candidates are interviewed.

"Besides grades, aptitude and interest count as well, especially for some of the niche degrees, such as culinary arts or game design," he said.

SIT's incoming batch of students, who start classes next week, said the main draw has been the high standing of its partner institutions.

Nanyang Polytechnic diploma holder Bryan Yeo, 22, who had an almost perfect GPA of 3.98, had offers of places from both NUS and NTU but said he decided on DigiPen.

"It is one of the two best schools I know... if you are into game design and programming," he said.

Ms Rahmathunnisa Mohamed Maideen, 20, who had a perfect score of 4.0 for her chemical and pharmaceutical technology course in Nanyang Polytechnic, had offers of places from NUS and NTU, as well as a scholarship.

But she chose Newcastle University's chemical engineering course, which is offered through SIT.

She said: "Newcastle is highly regarded. What's more, I can complete the degree in two years and for under \$30,000."

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Ms Rahmathunnisa, who had a perfect GPA of 4.0, chose a course through SIT over places in NUS and NTU.

BERITA HARIAN FILE PHOTO



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