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## How will Govt count extra uni places?

THE Government should elaborate on the promise made by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to increase the number of university places offered to Singaporeans by 2,000, by 2015 (“2,000 more uni places for local students”; Aug 15).

According to an Aug 16 report, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) has taken in 1,000 students this year (“Expand varsity places, but not at expense of quality”). Also, the Singapore University of Technology and Design will have 500 students in its first batch next year (“SUTD: Full steam ahead for new uni”; Aug 11).

Does the increase in 2,000 places for citizens include the 1,000 places offered by SIT this year and 500 by SUTD next year? Or would they be in addition to that?

This will determine whether there would actually be a significant increase in the number of university places offered to students by 2015.

Assuming a current foreign student proportion of approximately 20 per cent, 800 and 400 places from SIT and SUTD respectively would be reserved for Singaporeans. These add up to a total of 1,200 places – that is, 60 per cent of the promised increase in university places will already be offered to Singaporeans by next year.

About half of the courses offered by SIT are engineering degrees; moreover, SUTD too has a strong engineering focus.

Therefore, distributing the remaining 800 places evenly among the courses offered by the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University translates into only a slight increase in intake per course. This is not significant and is unlikely to cater to the rising aspirations of students seeking tertiary education in the future. The significant increase in engineering places may also not be in line with the aspirations of today’s students.

**Law Che Kun**

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