

SIT offers two new health degree courses

Classes in physiotherapy and occupational therapy will begin in August

BY LIN ZHAOWEI

ASPIRING occupational therapists and physiotherapists can now enrol in degree programmes here instead of doing it overseas.

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) yesterday announced two new programmes - Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy and Bachelor of Science in Physiotherapy.

This makes SIT, which runs degree programmes for polytechnic graduates, the only institution here to offer degrees for allied health professionals in these specialisations.

The programmes, which will take one year to complete, will cater to the needs of the rapidly expanding health sector.

Classes start in August at Nanyang Polytechnic, in partnership with the renowned Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. The SIT, which does not have a centralised campus, conducts its classes at polytechnics.

The two programmes are now undergoing final ratification by Trinity College's university board in Ireland. Established in 1592, the college is recognised globally as Ireland's premier university. It counts two



Ms Ong, 23, who has a diploma in physiotherapy, is keen on upgrading that to a degree at SIT.

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Nobel laureates among its alumni.

The SIT is also offering five other new degree programmes this year, in the areas of communications and interior design, childhood education, aeronautical engineering and aerospace systems.

These were made possible by tie-ups with the Glasgow School of Art and the University of Glasgow in Britain, and Wheelock College in the United States.

This brings the total number of degree programmes offered by SIT to 24 for the upcoming academic year.

The institute will have 300 more places this year, raising its total intake to 1,300.

Mr Tan Chek Ming, SIT deputy president of operations, told reporters that the institute is looking to offer more degree programmes next year, possibly in finance, accountancy and hospitality.

Asked why SIT is now offering the degrees in occupational therapy and physiotherapy, he said it is to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding health sector.

"In four years' time, Singapore will need about 1,500 occupational therapists and physiotherapists. But today we only have about 800 to 900. So there is a gap," he said.

Mr Tan said Trinity College was chosen as SIT's partner because it is very well known in the health science sector.

Allied health professionals with degrees can expect better pay and career prospects. Currently, those in the public sector earn \$1,500 to \$2,150 with a diploma, while degree-holders get \$2,550 to \$2,800.

Nanyang Polytechnic deputy principal John Tan said that besides offering prospective diploma upgraders a chance to get degrees in physiotherapy and occupational therapy here, the new programmes may help retain talent in the country.

He noted that some students choose to stay on in their host countries after completing their overseas degrees.

Ms Kiyoko Ong, 23, who graduated with a diploma in physiotherapy at Nanyang Polytechnic last year, said she is keen on the degree programme at SIT. She now works as a physiotherapist at Raffles Hospital.

"Currently, diploma holders like me have have to go overseas to places such as Australia and Britain to get a degree. It may cost up to \$100,000 for a one-year conversion degree," she told The Straits Times.

She said the SIT degree is "definitely an alternative" because it would be much cheaper.

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