

News

**S'pore
Institute of
Technology
launches
new degree
programmes**



FOND OF CHILDREN: Desiree Bin, 17, helping to look after a friend's five-year-old sister.

PICTURE COURTESY OF DESIREE BIN

She's glad to have one more option after poly graduation

REPORT: **RENNIE WHANG**
wrennie@sph.com.sg

SHE has always been fond of children. That's why she chose to study early childhood education at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Desiree Bin, 17, is now in her second year.

And although she has yet to decide on her plans after graduation, she is glad that there is one more option available.

From August, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will be offering a new degree programme in early childhood education.

It is also introducing six other new degree programmes, in occupational therapy, physiotherapy, communication design, interior design, aeronautical engineering and aerospace systems.

Said Desiree: "I'm really excited to hear that a local university is offering this...it shows the Government is giving more attention to early childhood education."

Ms Shirley Leong, head of the human resource department at PAP Community Foundation, said that "the preschool sector has never been one which people desire to enter...(but) the landscape is changing".

Six out of 10 preschool children here enrol at its kindergartens.

It was reported in March last year that the Ministry of Education plans to double its investment in the preschool sector over the next four years.

State spending on scholarships, bursaries and teaching awards for preschool teachers was expected to rise to up to \$21 million.

In addition, it was announced last year that by 2016, at least 75 per cent of teachers in preschool centres must possess at least a diploma.

SIT's Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education will be a joint offering between Wheelock College from Boston, Massachusetts, and Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

Wheelock's programme is focused on special



TRAINING: Ngee Ann Polytechnic students during a training session with an instructor from Wheelock College.

PICTURE: SIT

needs, and developing management and leadership skills, said Dr David Fedo, executive director and visiting scholar at the Wheelock College Center for International Education, Leadership and Innovation in Singapore.

"We don't do a lot of pure lecturing," he said, adding that there is an emphasis on practical skills such as the ability to work with a child's parents.

Overseas universities

SIT, which was set up in 2009, offers degree programmes in partnership with local polytechnics and overseas universities.

It aims to take in 1,300 students in August this year, up from the 950 who matriculated last year.

SIT could not confirm the cost of the programme, but said that it would fall within the \$20,000 and \$27,000 range that it now charges over two years of education.

Other than Wheelock College, this year sees SIT partnering two more overseas universities: The Glasgow School of Art and Trinity College Dublin, both from the UK.

Polytechnic grades would not be the sole fac-

tor in admissions, said Professor Tan Chin Tiong, president of SIT.

"We consider a candidate's O-level results as well as conduct interviews, which partners at our overseas universities participate in.

"We look at how passionate the applicants are," he said, noting that SIT may even ask for references from employers.

Miss Doranna Wong, 35, who was from the pioneer cohort of Ngee Ann Polytechnic early childhood education students in 2002, recounted how she had to go overseas to further her education as there were no degree programmes offered here.

She said: "It's great to know there are more options now than before...we need more recognition that higher qualifications are desirable for working with children from birth to school age."

Ms Leong agreed.

She said: "The most important point is that we want quality teachers, and this programme will help work towards that."

For now, Desiree hasn't decided what to do post-diploma.

But she said: "If I want an early childhood degree, this would be my top choice."