



The Singapore Institute of Technology's Open House event at the Suntec Convention Centre in January.

SIT may be further developed

Committee studying university sector unveils its plans at dialogue session

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SINGAPORE — As the Government looks for ways to create more degree opportunities for Singaporeans, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) may be further developed as an institution, Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong signalled yesterday.

Mr Wong, who heads a committee studying ways to expand the university sector here, also mooted more ideas that have surfaced after months of work by the committee. These include diversifying the types of programmes being offered at universities here and transforming the curriculum to become more practice-based — such as having more work-study programmes.

He was speaking to reporters after a dialogue with 400 people from the education industry yesterday.

Topics discussed included concerns that industry-linked tertiary institutions may be perceived as inferior to existing research-intensive universities, such as the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University. Some also sought a broader range of degree programmes, while others were concerned about an oversupply of graduates.

Speaking to reporters after the two-hour dialogue, Mr Wong said that one of the options being studied involves developing the SIT into an institution to complement existing universities and even offer its own courses.

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The SIT, which was set up to offer polytechnic graduates an additional route to a university degree, differs from the other three publicly-funded universities here as it offers niche degrees through tie-ups with overseas institutions.

Mr Wong, however, stressed that the best recommendation for the SIT has not yet been decided.

He also emphasised that, to meet the increasingly diverse aspirations of Singaporeans and more complex demands of the economy, the types of programmes offered need to be diversified.

There have been calls for Singapore institutions to offer more niche courses, such as in sports, hospitality, veterinary science and the arts.

Mr Wong also elaborated on the strategy of having "academic studies closely integrated with work", such as by offering

cooperative programmes, meaning undergraduates will work in the industry for entire semesters. Such a practice is common in American and Finnish universities.

"These are offered by high quality universities, and the outcomes have been very positive. This will also go some way in addressing some concerns expressed earlier ... their fear that this new university model might be inferior to our existing university pathways," he said.

During the two-hour town hall session at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, the 15-member university committee took many questions from the audience, which comprised polytechnic and university students and teachers, some from the private education sector.

Employers, including a mix of multinationals and small and medium-sized enterprises, were also present.

The committee, which comprises industry chiefs and university and polytechnic heads, will finalise its recommendations by the later half of the year. In the meantime, it plans to go on more study trips and hold more focus groups.