

# Singapore Institute of Tech could be 5th varsity

Lawrence Wong floats this possibility  
as part of practice-oriented focus

By **STACEY CHIA**  
and **SANDRA DAVIE**

THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which partners overseas universities to offer degree courses to polytechnic upgraders, could become Singapore's fifth university.

Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong broached this possibility yesterday as he briefed the media on a recent trip he led to study the German university system.

Mr Wong, who heads a committee looking into providing more university places for Singaporeans, said the trip further affirmed the committee's thinking that if the country were to have another university, it should be practice-oriented and closely linked to industry. It should also offer programmes that combine work and study.

Mr Wong said the 15-member panel had already indicated that SIT, with its practical bent, could be a "possible platform" for this applied university model.

But it would have to be restructured as it does not award its own degrees.

SIT, set up three years ago, has an enrolment of about 1,500. It offers 24 degree programmes from 10 overseas schools such as the Technical University of Munich and the University of Glasgow.

Mr Wong also gave an update on the committee's work that started in August last year.

Since last October, the members have also visited Finland, France, Hong Kong and the US.

He said the committee will submit its preliminary recommendations next month to an international panel that advises the Government on higher education.

The international panel, which includes top university administrators, will hold its biennial

meeting early next month.

On this most recent study trip, Mr Wong and two members of the committee - Professor Cheong Hee Kiat, president of SIM University, and Mr Mohamed Faizal Mohamed Abdul Kadir, deputy senior state counsel at the Attorney-General's Chambers - visited three applied universities in Baden-Wuerttemberg and Berlin.

Mr Wong said companies work closely with the applied universities to shape the curriculum, which makes their graduates attractive to these employers.

As a result, these schools were highly sought after. One he visited had 15,000 applicants for a particular programme but only 1,500 were admitted.

Representatives of German engineering firm Festo told Mr Wong that out of 10 engineers it hires, eight would come from an applied university.

As the applied university model is markedly different from what is currently offered in Singapore, Mr Wong said getting support will be important.

The committee has held several focus group discussions with students, parents and employers.

Students and parents generally welcomed the move to provide more university places and the idea of an applied university. But poly students said they would be less keen on a traditional three-year university programme, and would rather get a degree in two years at SIT or abroad.

Feedback from employers and companies has been positive, said Mr Wong, but "some will be more ready than others" for a work and study programme.

About 27 per cent of the cohort now goes to publicly funded universities and this rate is expected to reach 30 per cent by 2015.

✉ [staceyc@sph.com.sg](mailto:staceyc@sph.com.sg)  
✉ [sandra@sph.com.sg](mailto:sandra@sph.com.sg)