

SIT to be full-fledged university by 2014

Work-cum-study scheme a feature of its autonomous varsity blueprint

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THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will become an autonomous university by 2014.

When that happens, it will go beyond its current two-year model to offer three- and four-year degree courses.

It will also offer its own degrees – on top of the degrees from its partner universities – and run a cooperative education programme which will require students to alternate between semesters of full-time study and relevant paid work.

SIT's blueprint for conversion into a full-fledged university was announced yesterday by its president-designate Tan Thiam Soon in a press conference held at the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Buona Vista.

SIT was marked as one of two new universities – the other being SIM University – to add places for Singapore's degree hopefuls.

As the Republic's fifth and sixth universities, the two schools are expected to provide the bulk of the 3,000 additional places yearly, and raise the cohort participation rate from the current 27 per cent to 40 per cent by 2020.

The cohort participation rate refers to the percentage of students in an age group that enters university.

Currently, SIT runs degrees such as in chemical engineering and interior design offered by its 10 overseas partners, including the Technical University of Munich and University of Glasgow.

These are two-year programmes catering to mostly polytechnic upgraders. More than 90 per cent of its students are from the polytechnics.

"It's not about putting out a new degree programme, it's really about looking... way beyond the next few years at sectors that we know will have demand for highly trained manpower," said Professor Tan.

Senior Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong, who led the committee that looked into expanding university places, said SIT was picked to offer the applied degree pathway because it already had several elements of such a model.

These include having close links with the industry. Last year, there were 34 industry partners sponsoring scholarships for 12 per cent of its students.

MOE noted in a press statement yesterday that SIT's current programme offerings with partner universities already have a "strong applied element", such as in engineering and allied health.

When asked if polytechnic students will take to the cooperative programme requiring them to combine work and study, Prof Tan said such an education is not the same as a work attachment.

He said that for the programme, employers and work experiences of the students will be carefully selected to ensure they build on what is taught in class.

Mr Wong said that although some students raised concerns that the cooperative education would make their courses longer,



SIT's programme offerings such as in engineering (above) already have a "strong applied element", noted the ministry. PHOTO: SINGAPORE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

they realised it was "not so much of a trade-off" when its value was pointed out to them.

"When you explain to students what a co-op programme entails and it is not just an extended in-

ternship... they realise that this adds value to their experience and later to their ability to get a good job," he said.

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