

EDUCATION

Work a year as part of your degree

SIT to let undergrads take on extended industry attachments for higher than internship pay

SUMITA SREEDHARAN
sumitas@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – Undergraduates could work in a company for up to a year while they obtain their qualifications at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

SIT, which is to be Singapore's fifth autonomous university, will be embarking on an industry-oriented approach through the Cooperative Education Programme, as it opens admission to International Baccalaureate students as well.

SIT's existing cohort consists of mainly students from polytechnics and a handful of 'A'-level students.

Under the Co-Op programme, undergraduates take on extended work attachments and are involved in "work and projects that impact the company", according to SIT President, Professor Tan Thiam Soon.

They will also receive pay higher than a typical internship salary, commensurate with the work they do.

The programme is used in universities such as Drexel University in Philadelphia in the United States, where students can opt for the four-year degree course with a minimum six months of work, or the five-year degree course, which requires up to 18 months of work.

SIT has yet to release details on how it will implement the programme but revealed yesterday it would talk to industry partners about tie-ups soon.

SIT already has strong industry links. Last year, 34 industry partners sponsored scholarships for 12 per cent of SIT's students in various disciplines.

Companies that TODAY spoke to expressed interest in taking on SIT students.

Mr Patrick Fiat, General Manager of Royal Plaza on Scotts, felt the programme would allow undergraduates to ascertain if they are suited for the industry as well as possibly "helping to ease the labour crunch that is increasingly challenging in our industry".

One of the considerations would be if the student could work beyond the "internship" period, he added.

Mr Damien Tong, HR/Admin Manager at Camel Nuts, who is "cautiously optimistic" about the new university's success, pointed out there would be concerns as SIT was still a new institution without a proven track record.

However, he saw the programme as an opportunity to bring new local blood into the industry. "The food science technology area is in need of more talented locals and we will look into tapping the new talents," he said.

Other than SIT, the Government also hopes to tap the private education sector to create more pathways for those wanting to get a degree.

During his National Day Rally speech, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said more help would be given to part-time students at SIM University (UniSIM), which will be the sixth university. The Ministry of Education is now working with UniSIM to make government financial assistance schemes available to its part-time undergraduates next year. More details will be announced later.

In Academic Year 2011, the Government subsidised about 4,200 new part-time degree students at the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and UniSIM.



SIT will be Singapore's fifth autonomous university.