SIT plans to offer three of its own degrees next year

They are in accountancy, software development and infrastructure engineering

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THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) plans to offer its own degrees in infrastructure engineering, software development and accountancy next year.

The publicly funded institute, which is being transformed into Singapore’s fifth university, is now waiting for the green light from the Education Ministry and professional accreditation bodies.

The three proposed degrees, which are expected to offer 50 to 70 places each, are likely to include a work study component, in which students will alternate between study and work during their second year.

Set up in 2009, SIT currently offers only degrees awarded by overseas schools, for instance the Technical University of Munich and the University of Glasgow, in fields such as chemical engineering and economics.

These two-year programmes attract mostly polytechnic upgraders, who make up about 95 per cent of the yearly intake. This year, the institute took in 1,300 students into 26 courses.

SIT president Tan Thiam Soon said its new work-study programme will not be one-size-fits-all – but will be organised to suit the needs of its partner firms.

Accountancy students, for example, could do their internship from January to April, the busiest period for auditing firms.

Those doing software development could work in the morning, and spend the afternoon on a work-related project at SIT.

“We want our students to look at solutions to problems they encounter at work, or think about how to speed up or automate a process. They can bring it to class as a project and get input from their lecturers,” said Professor Tan.

With the work-study component, students will need an extra year to complete a course.

Some students have expressed unhappiness over this but Prof Tan said they will be paid good wages by the partner companies. He added that the extensive work exposure will be likely to boost their job prospects.

This is the experience at American universities that offer a similar scheme, called the co-operative education programme.

At Drexel University, for instance, more than a third of its graduates can clock as much as 18 months of work experience in a five-year degree course and land jobs with their co-op employers even while studying. Their work experience is valued and this is reflected in higher starting salaries.

Prof Tan said the university zeroed in on the three programmes because there was strong demand for trained graduates in these specialised fields, including infrastructure engineering, which prepares students for jobs such as transport systems planning and maintenance.

Accountancy may be offered by four out of the other five local universities, including SIM University, but places are still limited, forcing many polytechnic graduates to head overseas.

He also noted that many accountancy graduates from local universities go into banking and finance, hence the industry’s demand for more accountants.

The specific focus of the courses combined with the work-study scheme is aimed at nurturing specialists with deep skill sets, said Prof Tan. He added that this suits polytechnic graduates as they tend to be specialists, rather than generalists.

“Many of them have a keen interest and aptitude in one particular area. They are what I would call, singularly talented.”

He hopes that in the future companies looking for specialists will turn to SIT first. "Say a company needs a top-notch programmer, I hope they will immediately look to hiring a SIT graduate.”

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