SIT plans big increase in student numbers

Varsity to raise enrolment from 3,000 now to over 10,000 by 2020

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TO GIVE four in 10 Singaporeans a shot at a degree at home, the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will grow its current enrolment of 3,000 to more than 10,000 by 2020.

That means doubling its annual intake of 1,500 to 3,000.

To house the much bigger student body, SIT said yesterday that it was already working with relevant agencies to establish a main campus.

Its students now attend classes at polytechnics where the university’s satellite campuses are being built. But SIT’s president Tan Thiam Soon admitted that it has had to rethink its original plan of having satellite campuses in polytechnics and its offices headquartered in Dover Road.

He would not be drawn into revealing the possible location of the future main campus, saying that “it need not be in the western part of the island”, where the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University are already located.

Last year, the Government announced plans to increase university places so that 40 per cent of any one cohort can pursue a full-time degree here, up from the current 27 per cent.

Set up in 2009 as Singapore’s fifth university, SIT has 27 degree programmes which are all awarded by overseas schools like Glasgow University and the Technical University of Munich.

The two-year programmes, in fields such as chemical engineering and aerospace systems, attract mostly polytechnic upgraders, who make up about 95 per cent of the intake.

But from next year, SIT will offer its own degrees in infrastructure engineering, software engineering and accountancy.

At yesterday’s press conference to detail these three new programmes, Professor Tan said SIT will set itself apart from other universities here by nurturing “best-in-class specialists” – graduates with deep knowledge and skills in a particular field.

SIT’s provost Ting Seng Kiong highlighted the infrastructure engineering degree, which will train engineers who can design, monitor and maintain infrastructure such as transport systems and power grids, as a “one-of-a-kind” programme.

He said the other five universities here do not offer such a specialisation.

Students will also have to spend eight months to a year on a work-study programme designed to be more in-depth and structured than a traditional industrial attachment.

Prof Tan believes this opportunity to augment theory with real work experience will help students to hit the ground running when they graduate.

SIT said a host of organisations – from the Infocomm Development Authority and the Land Transport Authority to accounting firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and RSM Choo Lin – have indicated keen interest to take in SIT students under the work-study scheme.

The university has also formed industry advisory committees made up of prominent people from the related industries to guide curriculum development for each of the three new degrees.

Each course will be about 2/3 years to four years long, depending on whether students have relevant polytechnic diplomas. But all students will share a common SIT DNA, said Prof Tan.

“They will be thinking tinkerers... able to embrace change and ambiguity, and able to learn, unlearn and relearn.”

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