Poly, ITE students should go for longer stints to get better idea of jobs in marine sector

By Pearl Lee

Student internships in the offshore and marine sector are currently too short and designed more to give them a taster, said a senior industry representative.

But ideally, internships involving poly and ITE students should be longer to help companies recruit potential employees, said Mr Michael Chia, managing director of marine and technology at Keppel Offshore and Marine, on Wednesday.

Companies should also be more involved in choosing the interns from polys and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

He was speaking to the media at a visit organised by a committee in charge of reviewing applied education in polytechnics and the ITE. It aims to make students' classroom lessons more relevant to the real world.

Mr Chia said internships should ideally go up to nine months to a year, so that the job scope of the interns will not be limited by the short time they have with the company.

Currently, students from polytechnics and the ITE do internships ranging from one to six months during their course of study. Students are also matched to the various companies by their schools.

"Right now, we offer the number of [internship] places, and leave it to the institutions to allocate... But is there a better way to do that so that... we get to choose students who we think, at the end of the day, can end up [working] with us?" said Mr Chia.

He added that while there was no lack of students from polytechnics and universities applying to join the company after graduation, it faced challenges in attracting those from ITE, as most have the mindset that working in a shipyard is tiring.

Senior Minister of State for Law and Education Indranee Rajah, who chairs the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review (ASPIRE) committee noted though that the ideal arrangement varies from industries to industries.

"How you implement [internships] in terms of the timeline... there is room for some variables depending on the sector," she said.

She had said in Parliament earlier this month that the committee is considering initiatives to enhance internships and have better career guidance and support for students.

Keppel employee, Mr Muhammad Isa Sanusi, 28, a superintendent based in Keppel's Bintan yard, had joined the company as a poly graduate. After three years, he was offered a scholarship by his supervisors to pursue a full-time degree in naval architecture at the Singapore Institute of Technology.

"One thing about this company is that you are assessed based on your performance and competency, and not on your paper qualifications," he said.