University places rise to 14,000 this year
Target to offer admission to 30% of cohort reached a year ahead of plan

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THE Ministry of Education (MOE) will open up more university places this year, bringing the number of places at the six universities, including the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and SIM University (UniSIM), to 14,000.

This means the Government’s target of providing university places for 30 per cent of an age group will be reached a year earlier than planned.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat announced this in a Facebook post yesterday as he congratulated SIT on officially becoming an autonomous university. With the new status, five-year-old SIT can confer its own degrees. Previously, it could award only joint degrees with overseas institutions.

About one in five polytechnic graduates is expected to win a place in the publicly funded universities this year, said an MOE spokesman.

Most of the new varsity places are being created from the expansion of SIT and UniSIM.

UniSIM in Clementi will add three full-time degrees to its part-time offerings. The courses in marketing, finance and accountancy will offer 200 places.

SIT, which offers niche degrees from overseas universities, will run its own programmes this year in infrastructure engineering, software development and accountancy and add another 200 places.

The other four varsities, Nanyang Technological University (NTU), National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) and Singapore Management University (SMU), are also adding places with new courses.

Launching three new undergraduate degrees in August, NTU is offering nearly 100 places in philosophy and earth science and one course merging engineering with business. Yale-NUS College is increasing its intake from 150 last year to 170 this year, while SMU and SUTD are jointly offering a dual-degree programme in technology and management for 45 people.

Mr Heng stressed that quality will not be affected. “Even as we create more places, we want our students to be able to meet the rigours of the programmes, and at the same time, to make the best use of opportunities as our economy grows and becomes more diverse,” he said in his post.

He also highlighted SIT and UniSIM’s applied learning approach, noting the increasing diversity of higher education here.

There are other ways young people can build deep skills and knowledge, he said. “If the best path for you is to take some time to work and gain experience – do that!” he advised, adding that MOE will press on to offer publicly funded university spaces for 40 per cent of every cohort by 2020.

With 10 per cent of each cohort earning a degree from part-time courses, up to half of each age group could enjoy a government-subsidised degree education.

Parents welcomed the news.

Widow Diana Seah, 45, hopes the extra places mean a higher chance for her son, who wants to study business, and her daughter, who is interested in studying disasters and volcanoes. “On my pay as an admin manager, I cannot afford to send my kids overseas. So, it is good that the Government is opening up more places and courses that our kids are interested in.”