

# Scope for a 'practice-oriented' varsity

Panel considering model where studies integrate work experience

By SANDRA DAVIE  
SENIOR WRITER

THERE is scope for Singapore to develop a new university model – one that is teaching-focused and practice-oriented with close industry ties, said Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong in Parliament yesterday.

At such a university, academic studies could be integrated with practical, hands-on work experience, and students could alternate between semesters of full-time study and relevant paid work.

Mr Wong, who chairs a committee looking into providing more degree opportunities, said this was one of the broad considerations by the panel, which is looking at how it can expand the university sector while maintaining quality.

The 15-member university committee includes industry chiefs, and university and polytechnic heads.

It will also study how best to implement such a "practice-oriented"

university model, Mr Wong said.

One possibility is to leverage on the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) which is already pioneering some elements of such a model.

SIT, which offers degree courses in fields such as early childhood education and animation in partnership with overseas universities, is practice-oriented and has strong links with industry.

Mr Wong was responding to several Members of Parliament, including Ms Low Yen Ling (Chua Chu Kang GRC) and Mr Ang Wei Neng (Jurong GRC), who had asked about providing more degree opportunities for Singaporeans.

**The committee is studying university loan schemes subsidised by governments, such as those in Britain and Canada, to see if they can be offered here as an additional source of financing for university education.**

Mr Ang also asked about subsidies for Singaporeans enrolled in degree programmes in private schools.

About 100,000 Singaporeans and permanent residents are enrolled in private schools here, of whom 40,000 are pursuing degrees.

Mr Wong said that while the committee sees a role for private providers in meeting the demand for university education, this has to be managed carefully to preserve the value of university education for Singaporeans.

He added that the private education sector is made up of many different players of varying quality.

Mr Wong said that as Singapore's economy restructures over the next decade, there will be a growing demand for graduates.

One useful indicator is the proportion of high-skilled jobs in the economy.

Currently, about a third of the resident labour force is employed in professional, managerial and executive (PME) jobs, almost a 20 per cent increase from a decade ago.

As the Government opens up new places and pathways, Mr Wong said it must ensure that university education remains affordable.

The Government already offers tuition fee subsidies to students in public universities and a full range of financial help schemes, including bursaries.

But more can be done through loan schemes for students, Mr Wong said.

The committee he heads is studying university loan schemes subsidised by governments, such as those in Britain and Canada, to see if they can be offered here as an additional source of financing for university education.

Polytechnic students and their parents welcomed the news on the committee considering a teaching-focused, practice-oriented university.

Mr Walter Lam, 48, a businessman with two polytechnic-going sons, said he was worried after he heard that only about one in five polytechnic graduates gets a university place locally.

"But now it sounds like the Government is seriously looking into offering more places for the polytechnic graduates," he said.

 [sandra@sph.com.sg](mailto:sandra@sph.com.sg)