

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

More full-time places for applied degrees

SIT, UniSIM to be fifth and sixth universities

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SINGAPORE – As part of the Republic's efforts to raise the annual university intake, SIM University (UniSIM), which currently offers only part-time programmes, will offer full-time degree programmes, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced yesterday.

UniSIM will remain a private university. Nevertheless, more part-time places will be made available and government bursaries and loans will be extended to UniSIM's part-time students, so that they "get the same support" as part-time students in the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University, Mr Lee said.

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will also increase its number of places and award degrees in its own name.

SIT and UniSIM will become Singapore's fifth and sixth universities, said Mr Lee, as he noted that Singaporeans have "very high aspirations".

By 2020, the annual intake will be increased by 3,000, from the current 13,000 to 16,000. Correspondingly, 40 per cent of each cohort will go to university, up from the current 27 per cent.

Mr Lee said the extension of government bursaries and loans to UniSIM part-time students was in response to its students asking him if the Government would allow them to use the Central Provident Fund (CPF) to pay for their education, just like those taking full-time courses.

"I said no, you are working, you have responsibilities, your CPF is for



By 2020, the annual intake of university students will increase to 16,000. TODAY FILE PHOTO

your house and future, we will give you more support, I'll prefer the Government to help you, rather than you take from your CPF," he said.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is expected to release more details this week. And Mr Lee said he hoped Singaporeans will take advantage of the initiative — "not just to collect that piece of paper but to develop yourselves, learn something new and useful and make a contribution to society".

UniSIM President Cheong Hee Ki-

at told TODAY that currently, 55 per cent of the fees for its part-time students are subsidised.

"But for some of them it is still difficult to pay the other 45 per cent as they have so many other financial commitments," he said. He revealed that UniSIM has been working on offering full-time programmes for the "last seven years".

He added that it is committed to finding opportunities for "mutual learning" between part-time and full-time students.

3,000

THE INCREASE
IN ANNUAL
UNIVERSITY
INTAKE BY 2020

VIDEO
SINGAPORE
TO HAVE 2 MORE
UNIVERSITIES

Scan the QR code using the reader app on your smartphone, or you can visit tdy.sg/cnatwounis for the video.



On the SIT's expansion, its President, Professor Tan Chin Tiong, paid tribute to its partners and the staff who worked "so hard to bring SIT to where it is in just a few short years".

Pre-school sector set for a shake-up

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**OBSERVERS WELCOME
'MINDSET CHANGE'**

Even as the quality is raised, fees will remain affordable and more support will be given to low- and middle-income families. "Our objective is to level up all our students, and make a positive difference to their development, especially the students from the

disadvantaged homes," Mr Lee said.

In recent weeks, the Lien Foundation released the results of studies and surveys on the pre-school sector. Apart from an online parents' poll — in which seven in 10 respondents want kindergarten classes to be part of the formal education system — the foundation also released two studies.

The first showed that Singapore's pre-school education ranked in the bottom half internationally, while the second involved pre-school leaders and experts who called for sweeping and urgent reforms — including making pre-school education free and partially nationalising the sector.

Lien Foundation chairman Laurence Lien, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament, welcomed Mr Lee's announcements. "It shows a change in mindset about pre-schools. It does seem that previously the Government did not think it was important but now there seems to be a re-

newed sense ... the Government is feeling it is important and there is political commitment to improving pre-schools in Singapore," Mr Lien told TODAY.

He added that setting up a statutory board would "put the focus on pre-schools" as there would be "dedicated people who are hired to look at this issue and to make sure that the quality improves".

Early childhood expert Sirene Lim said the "thoughtful implementation" of the measures would be crucial. For example, the training of pre-school teachers has to go beyond "obtaining a certification or attending a couple of workshops and courses", she pointed out.

Dr Lim said: "I hope the Government will not rush into implementing solutions, but study what other countries have done and learn from their ways to craft our own solutions suited to our context."

99%

OF ALL
CHILDREN
ATTEND
PRE-SCHOOL

“The collective measures will assuage the anxiety of concerned parents about the quality and affordability of pre-school sector... With a national commitment, the focus will now be to develop a national vision with a well-resourced plan ... to bulldoze the barriers of quality and affordability that has plagued the sector for too long.

Mr Lee Poh Wah
CEO OF LIEN FOUNDATION

“What is most encouraging is PM urging parents not to rush into learning at their child's young age. We have encountered parents asking for worksheets, spelling lists ... parents need to be educated that children learn best through play. I am also glad to know that there will be more resources.

Ms Hayati Sulaiman
NTUC MY FIRST SKOOL (HOUGANG AVE 1) PRINCIPAL