

Room for more graduates

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27 per cent to 40 per cent — or from 13,000 to 16,000 — while the percentage getting part-time degrees will increase from 7 per cent to 10 per cent.

Mr Wong said that, based on current labour trends, the employability of future graduates remains viable.

The increase in the number of university places here would also mean that more Singaporeans would be able to pursue a degree without going overseas.

Jurong Secondary student Ihan Jamal, 16, who has plans to go to a university abroad, said he will have more options in Singapore to look at when deciding his path later. “I will now also look at the local choices to compare (with the foreign universities),” he said.

Economists and human resource experts TODAY spoke to generally welcomed the Government’s plans to produce more graduates, as long as the quality is maintained and their skills are not homogenous.

Nevertheless, as more graduates enter the job market, they warned of stiffer competition among job-seekers.

Mr Manu Bhaskaran, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, noted that it is “hard to say” whether the economy is able to support more graduates. “A lot depends not on the rate of growth but the drivers of that growth. If we shift to higher productivity-driven growth and maintain our competitiveness in diverse areas, it is quite likely that Singapore graduates will find work easily,” he said.

CIMB Regional Economist Song Seng Wun was optimistic on the employability of future graduates. But he added that this was on the assumption there is no severe economic crunch and that potential shocks from the volatile external economy are well-insulated by government policies.

HR expert Josh Goh from The GMP Group noted that, with more graduates, “being a regular or ordinary employee will no longer be sufficient”. He said: “(Job-seekers) must continuously upgrade themselves ... develop new skill sets, even in areas outside their basic qualifications.”

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Room for more graduates

Mindful of the risks, committee gives assurance that the economy will be able to cope

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SINGAPORE — With the Government increasing the number of university places, Senior Minister of State (Education and Information, Communications and the Arts) Lawrence Wong yesterday gave the assurance that the Republic’s economy has room for more graduates.

“Going forward, clearly, we can accommodate more university graduates,” said Mr Wong.

In his speech at the National Day Rally on Sunday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that SIM University (UniSIM) — which currently offers only part-time programmes — will offer full-time degree programmes as part of the Republic’s

PME JOBS ARE FASTEST GROWING SEGMENT

Official figures showed that professional, managerial and executive-type jobs are the “fastest growing segment” in the workforce — up from 27 per cent in 2001 to 32 per cent last year.

Among economically-active Singapore residents between 25 and 29 years old, 46 per cent already held degree qualifications.

Among employed residents in this age group, 44 per cent receive monthly salaries of at least S\$3,000.

In 2009, the average university entry rate among Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries was 59 per cent.

According to latest data, for example, about 65 per cent of each cohort enter university in Finland while about 15 per cent do so in South Korea.

In Hong Kong, the proportion is about 18 per cent.

efforts to raise the annual university intake. The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) will also increase its number of places and award degrees

in its own name.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday to elaborate on Mr Lee’s announcement, Mr Wong, who led the committee looking at university education beyond 2015, said: “We were very mindful of the risk of expanding too rapidly, and compromising quality as a result of over-expansion.”

Citing recent media reports of South Korea facing a glut of unemployed degree holders, Mr Wong added: “We know that we should not expand just for the sake of providing an opportunity to get a paper chase, this is not about getting a degree as a piece of paper (but) building (a) skilled workforce that can meet the needs of the economy.”

By 2020, as much as 50 per cent of each cohort will enter university.

This includes both full-time and part-time degree students.

In other words, the proportion of each cohort pursuing a publicly-funded full-time degree will go up from

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