



Mr Ong (in pink shirt) at PSA Terminal Building 3 yesterday. The minister, who spoke at the company yesterday, said education in Singapore is beginning to value practical skills and not just paper qualifications. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

More time to sign up for Earn and Learn Programme

Students can now apply before NS and up to 3 years after NS or graduating from school

MORE PROGRAMMES

60

Number of programmes this year, compared with 40 last year.

1,000

Participants expected this year, double last year's 500.

Lin Yangchen

Not only is the range of the SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme (ELP) being expanded, students will also get more time to decide whether to sign on.

Interested polytechnic and Institute of Technical Education (ITE) students can now apply before they enlist in national service (NS) and up to three years after finishing NS or graduating from school.

Previously, they could apply only after finishing NS and not more than a year after graduation.

SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG) said the move will raise the number of eligible applicants, and enable them to embark immediately on their placements after completing NS.

The number of programmes will go up, and more varied industries will be involved. There will be 60 programmes this year, up from 40 last year – with 1,000 participants expected, double last year's 500. New sectors offering the ELP include building services, human resource, medical technology, sports and wellness, and digital media production.

The ELP allows participants to build on the knowledge they learnt in school, and have a smoother and structured transition into working life through on-the-job training and mentorship. Those already in the ELP say they are reaping the benefits of combining school and work.

Mr Ronald Lim, for example, started a year-long ELP stint with PSA Singapore last year, helping to beef up the firm's cyber security. The 27-year-old Temasek Polytechnic graduate with a diploma in digital forensics said: "It has taught me better time management as I have to juggle school and work. And I am

able to relate the theory I learnt in school to what's actually happening on the ground."

His mentor at PSA, senior manager (IT security) Steven Sim, said Mr Lim brings new skills to PSA. Mr Lim, for instance, is using computer forensics to automate the analysis of activity in PSA's computer systems to detect potential threats. This is crucial as heavy machinery used in ports is increasingly connected via information technology.

Mr Ong Kim Pong, regional CEO for South-east Asia at PSA International, said: "Domain knowledge is very important in the maritime sector and it takes time to learn. Through the ELP, they actually get hands-on (experience) of exactly what their job is going to be like. They will not only grow their skills, but also be readily deployable within the company."

Speaking at PSA yesterday, Education Minister (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung said education in Singapore was beginning to value practical skills and not just paper qualifications. "Over time, the selection criteria (for applying to universities and companies, for example) will emphasise less on academic grades. That will hopefully free up space for students to learn other things that are useful in life."

SSG is also looking into opportunities for ELP participants to study modules at local universities, with a view to getting degrees. For example, Temasek Polytechnic has plans to work with the Singapore University of Social Sciences and Singapore Institute of Technology in this area.

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