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Final SIT batch of early childhood education students graduates

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Tears flowed freely and voices cracked over the microphone on stage at the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) yesterday as staff and graduands celebrated the final graduation ceremony for an early childhood education degree programme offered by Wheelock College from Boston, United States.

The 64 students were from the 2016 batch, which was the last group to be enrolled before SIT phased out the programme.

The Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) introduced a full-time degree course in early childhood education last year.

The SIT-Wheelock College degree programme was launched in 2012 but Wheelock College's impact in Singapore's early childhood education sector goes back to 1991.

Lien Foundation chief executive Lee Poh Wah said the sector in Singapore was built on the expertise, commitment and goodwill of many pioneers like Wheelock College which took a chance partnering Singapore three decades ago.

"This partnership evolved to stay relevant to our changing needs and their large alumni footprint continues to positively shape the lives of our children and the agenda for the sector in Singapore," he said.

Singapore's first master's degree programme in early childhood education was established by RTRC

Asia (now Seed Institute) and Wheelock College in 1991.

In 2007, Wheelock College launched a full-time Bachelor of Science degree in early childhood education in collaboration with Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Seed Institute. It evolved into the SIT-Wheelock College programme in 2012.

Wheelock College president David J. Chard said the institution was part of Singapore's education sector early on. "Wheelock became involved in Singapore early in the country's development, at a time when people here were looking for answers for building a nation that is strong. They understood that one thing that they would have to do is build strong education systems."

Some 90 per cent of Wheelock College Singapore's over 3,700 alumni have worked as childcare teachers over the years, with 30 per cent of former students moving on to become principals.

The school's alumni include academic director of Seed Institute Ho Yin Fong, and manager for education at the National Gallery Singapore Elaine Chan.

Principal at Preschool for Multiple Intelligences and Wheelock College alumnus A'qilah Saiere, 25, said: "Most of the graduates join the field and are represented in different positions – ranging from special educators to administrators in the Early Childhood Development Agency."

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