

More taking private route to a degree

Shorter paths at private institutes among reasons

By JOANNA SEOW

MORE students are taking the private route to a degree, prompted by rising aspirations and shorter pathways.

In 2008, 26 per cent of residents here who studied in Singapore got their degrees from private education institutes, according to Manpower Ministry data. Last year, this proportion rose to 36 per cent.

Checks with four of the larger schools here – Singapore Institute of Management Global Education, Kaplan, PSB Academy and MDIS – showed enrolment has been generally rising.

“Over the last decade or so, there has been pent-up demand for a degree which cannot be met by the autonomous universities as there is a limit to the number of places they can add,” said SIM Global Education chief executive Lee Kwok Cheong.

Another reason private institutes have grown more popular is that degrees can be completed faster, some students said. Private degree programmes can be completed in as short as a year, compared with three to four years for a typical degree at National University of Singapore.

But Mountbatten MP Lim Biow Chuan, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, warned against the rush to get degrees.

For those who cannot meet the cut-offs for local universities, or who want to upgrade themselves, private institutes provide a chance to acquire more knowledge, he said.

“But don’t do it on the basis that this is a guaranteed route to



Mr Russell Tan, 24, got his degree from SIM Global Education. After a year at his job, he was promoted to account manager. ST PHOTO: SEAH KWANG PENG

success,” he cautioned.

About three in 10 residents in the labour force last year were degree holders, Manpower Ministry data showed. The paper chase has come under scrutiny after the Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review committee released its recommendations last month. There are worries that Singaporeans are chasing degrees without getting the right skills for the job market.

Recruiters say employers still make a distinction between degrees from local universities and from private institutes. Fresh graduates from local universities may be offered salaries around 10 to 15 per cent more than their private institute counterparts.

“(But) with a few years of experience and a proven track record, this gap narrows quickly,” said Ms Linda Teo, country manager at recruitment firm ManpowerGroup Singapore.

Bosses pay more attention to

work performance and attitude when appraising staff, said Association of Small and Medium Enterprises president Kurt Wee.

This proved true for account manager Russell Tan, 24, who decided on the private route after not doing well in his A Levels.

He graduated with magna cum laude honours and a communications degree from the University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, after his studies at SIM Global Education.

But out of 50 firms he applied to for advertising and marketing jobs, only two replied. One of them, digital marketing agency IH Digital, hired him. After a year on the job, he was promoted and leads a team of five.

“The course I took exposed me to a different style of learning with more applicable skills and knowledge, rather than memorising things,” said Mr Tan.

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