

# What S'pore can learn from German vocational schools

By **AMELIA TENG**

THE acclaimed German vocational school system is closely tied to business and industry, and this is something Singapore can learn from, said Germany's Ambassador to Singapore, Dr Michael Witter, yesterday.

A close partnership with employers is key. "They know what they need for qualified workplaces, which brings the economy forward and gives the individual well-paid work," he said.

Dr Witter was answering a question about lessons to be learnt from the success of the German vocational experience, at a forum attended by more than 200 university students at the National University of Singapore (NUS)'s Tembusu College.

The topic of discussion yesterday at the Tembusu Forum, which was moderated by the college's rector, Professor Tommy Koh, was whether it is better to be a master craftsman – someone who has deep specialised skills in a certain area – or a university graduate.

This comes in the wake of a government push to encourage students and working adults to emphasise skills and performance and not only paper qualifications.

Professor Vineeta Sinha, head of the South Asian Studies Programme at NUS, noted the categories did not have to be mutually exclusive.

"It is not a zero-sum game," she said, citing an example of a colleague who pursues pottery as a craft and encouraging students to choose courses based on their interests instead of just practical reasons. "It is not in

the interest of any party to see each other as adversaries."

The Institute of Technical Education (ITE)'s former chief executive Law Song Seng, one of the three speakers, said the ITE has come a long way, from being an option that people looked down upon to becoming a world-class institution attracting many visitors

from around the world.

Singaporeans have been brought up in a culture that values highly the work of scholars and academics, said Professor Law, adding that it will take time to change this mindset.

But he said he was hopeful that people will look at vocational careers differently in time. "Don't overlook the value of those who do labour work," he said.

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**INSIDE KNOWLEDGE**  
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– German Ambassador to Singapore Michael Witter, on the close partnership needed between business and vocational schools

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