

Education Minister says institutes of higher learning should embrace lifelong learning as part of mission

✔ SUE-ANNTAN

Eighteen years after he first graduated from the National University of Singapore (NUS), Mr Johnson Rajaratnam, 52, went back to school.

The senior research engineer graduated in 2000 with a Master's in electrical engineering.

Now, he continues to take courses in fields such as information technology to learn new skills.

Mr Rajaratnam is an example of the lifelong learner that the Ministry of Education (MOE) wants to nurture.

Education Minister (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung said yesterday that institutes of higher learning (IHLs) should embrace lifelong learning as part of their mission.

For example, NUS introduced a programme yesterday called NUS Lifelong Learners, or L3, where student enrolment will be made valid for 20 years from the point of undergraduate admission.

NUS now has about 38,000

# NUS unveils lifelong learning programme

undergraduate and graduate students.

It also has 288,600 alumni who will be automatically eligible for the L3 programme as well.

This programme will offer a "comprehensive, curated catalogue of skills-based, industry-relevant courses that cater to the lifelong learning needs of alumni", said NUS.

The courses will be in skills areas such as data analytics, finance, tech-enabled services, digital media, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, urban solutions, and advanced manufacturing.

Alumni may also stack up selected courses into qualifications such as graduate diplomas, or even bachelor's or master's degrees.

The programme will open for course applications on July 1, with the initial suite of courses beginning in August.

Mr Ong said: "I am sure this change in mind-set will spread

to all IHLs. Today, short courses for adults are mostly unpacked from long full-time programmes.

"In time, they will have to be developed independently, with a practical bent – delivered by practitioners on skills in demand by industries; or a futuristic bent – taught by researchers on cutting-edge technology."

## GLOBALISATION

Professor Ho Teck Hua, NUS senior deputy president and provost, said in a statement: "At NUS, we see lifelong learning as the key to ensuring that our students and alumni stay updated on the developments and disruptions that globalisation and digital technologies are bringing to the workplace."

To support the provision of modular courses for lifelong learning, such as the SkillsFuture Series, resources will be reallocated.

Mr Ong said that from next

year, for the majority of MOE-funded Postgraduate by Coursework programmes, the subsidy level for permanent residents will be adjusted slightly downwards, while that for international students will be discontinued.

However, there will be no change in the subsidy level for Singaporeans.

"This will free up around \$25 million in budget each year, which will be rechannelled to support modular courses at our IHLs for our local workforce," he added.

Said Mr Rajaratnam, who spent 13 months learning skills such as software coding: "I really enjoyed learning again, but then again, we're always learning at every part of our life. Even when we're young, we learn to walk and learn to read."

**- ADDITIONAL REPORTING  
BY LUCAS WONG**

[suetan@sph.com.sg](mailto:suetan@sph.com.sg)