

NUS alumni Genevieve Yeep and Lim Swee Hock are taking a business school module in personal finance and private wealth management at the university.  
ST PHOTO: DESMOND WEE



# NUS to redesign classes in lifelong learning push

All 288,600 alumni eligible for NUS Lifelong Learners courses

**Amelia Teng**  
Education Correspondent

Singapore's oldest university will redesign classes to serve industry needs, find fresh assessment methods and ways to make it easier for adults to take classes – all part of its “bold” push in encouraging its alumni to learn for life.

Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung announced on Monday that the National University of Singapore (NUS) will allow its undergraduates to be “enrolled” for 20 years, as the changing job market requires workers to upgrade their skills.

This will qualify them for continu-

ing education and training (CET) courses that they can take after they complete their degrees and go out to work.

NUS alumni – all 288,600 of them – are also automatically eligible for these courses as part of the initiative called NUS Lifelong Learners, or L<sup>3</sup> for short. Five hundred courses will be available in areas such as tech-enabled services, finance, urban solutions and data analytics.

NUS will offer virtual vouchers to alumni to offset the cost of one of its CET courses of the student's choosing. The university plans to offer 20,000 CET training places annually by the end of 2020.

The cost of courses will differ depending on their duration, from about \$800 per day. NUS will also look into offering programmes in leadership and management that target older adults.

NUS provost Ho Teck Hua said

the university will “figure out a way to satisfy the demand”.

“Capacity shouldn't be an issue in the short term. We have enough for 10,000 to 50,000 adults in one semester.”

If more show up, he said, NUS will look into hiring more part-time instructors, delivering more classes over weekends, investing more in technology, or even “staggering” alumni enrolment.

NUS also plans to develop a service to keep it in touch with alumni and offer advice.

“Currently we're asking them to make their own choices, but it will be nice to nudge them with advice, some help, curate training opportunities and job offers based on their profiles,” said Professor Ho.

“Someone might ask why stop at 20 years. Once a person is above 40, he would have a lot of work experience. We're hoping that the courses

we provide will carry them beyond 40 years old.”

Ms Wong Shu Yan, who graduated from NUS' faculty of engineering in 2012, called L<sup>3</sup> a “very good initiative” as she has always wanted to go back to keep learning.

“There are a lot of things I haven't acquired knowledge about, or been able to apply at work yet. And I still have so many years down the road,” said the 29-year-old, a workforce development manager in a semiconductor company.

Ms Nicole Png, who will apply to either NUS or Nanyang Technological University by the end of this month, said knowing that there are avenues to learn more after graduating helps to ease some fears.

“A lot of us who just finished the A levels feel that it's quite rushed to decide what we want to study next, or do as a job,” said the 18-year-old. “The L<sup>3</sup> programme gives me some confidence, that I can keep going back to school to learn something new if things change and there are new discoveries, or if I need to make a career switch in future.”

Prof Ho said L<sup>3</sup>'s aim is to transform tertiary education.

“We're saying, it's a guarantee that you will be in this big family for 20 years. If you want another certification, we cannot say no to you because we're committed.”

ateng@sph.com.sg

## Other varsities also plan to do more for working adults

Several local universities say they are committed to helping working adults by developing more courses in line with industry changes.

Many of these courses are subsidised by between 40 and 95 per cent for Singaporeans.

Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), which has over 1,600 undergraduate and postdoctoral students, and more than 800 alumni, will be ramping up the number of continuing education and training (CET) courses under the SkillsFuture Series from 20 to 60 over the next five years.

Professor Pey Kin Leong, associate provost of education at SUTD Academy & Digital Learning, said these courses are designed to meet industry needs and cover emerging technical areas such as data analytics and cyber security.

Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), which has about 15,000 students and 30,756 alumni, has two concession schemes for them to take its courses. They can also take up to two of its 679 modular courses at the university for free within two years of graduation.

A spokesman for SUSS said it is exploring giving credits to all alumni as and when they need them.

Professor Kam Chan Hin, Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) deputy provost (education), said it “believes in lifelong learning and this should not be limited by a stipulated number of years after admission or graduation”. “We believe that different types of personal development and skills upgrading are needed at different stages in their lives.”

All NTU alumni – more than 200,000 of them – can take any of the 169 CET courses in its College of Professional and Continuing Education until their retirement and even after that.

Singapore Management University launched its lifelong learning unit – SMU Academy – last year and it has since trained 5,000 participants.

The academy offers 160 courses in areas such as financial services, technology and intelligent systems and human capital.

The Singapore Institute of Technology, which became an autonomous university in 2014, said it is closely monitoring the needs and preferences of its alumni. A spokesman for the university, which has more than 6,500 alumni, said it will announce details of its lifelong learning plans for alumni soon.

Amelia Teng

95%

Maximum subsidy for courses for Singaporean working adults at local universities.