Universities offer courses to top poly students

Latest move makes it easier for them to take local degrees

By Sandra Davie
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More doors are opening for polytechnic students in Singapore eager for a headstart in getting a degree.

Next year, top polytechnic students can join their junior college peers in taking undergraduate courses at the three local universities.

The National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University said they are offering courses to junior college students, it makes sense to extend them to equally capable polytechnic students.

NUS vice-provost Lily Kong said: “It is in acknowledgement of the fact that there are some excellent polytechnic students who can also be challenged further in their development, just as the best A-level students can be.”

This is the latest in a series of moves in recent years to give Singaporean polytechnic students a better chance of getting local degrees.

They include a bigger intake of polytechnic graduates by the three universities, as well as easing the rules so even non-business diploma holders can apply to do business degrees.

As with the JCs, the polytechnic students will have the option to join the three universities next year.

And like the JCs, polytechnic officials are confident that many students will take up the universities’ offer, because it allows them to delve deeper into subjects they are interested in.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic deputy principal Tan Hang Cheong said: “It allows them to explore and discover their interests.” It will also give them a taste of university life and help them make more informed choices when picking undergraduate courses.

This year, about one in five, or 2,400 of 12,000 — places on offer at local universities will go to polytechnic graduates. It is big jump from just three years ago, when all three universities took in fewer than 1,000 each year.

Polytechnic students are delighted at the change. Marcus Tan, 17, a business student at Ngee Ann, said: “When I read about the A-level students being allowed to do it, I thought ‘why not the poly students?’ I am glad the unis have decided not to close their doors to us.

“There are many interesting courses that I would like to try out to see where my interests lie as far as future university options go.”

A trial run of the new programme was introduced by NUS in January, to uncover possible teaching problems.

Six students from three JCs were allowed to take courses in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and School of Computing. They all got above-average grades in their first modules, ranging from B-minus to A, beating many of their first-year undergraduate classmates.

The School of Computing’s Assistant Professor Chan Chee Yong taught two of them on a programming course and said they were showing the undergraduates how it should be done.

“They contributed well to the class of about 50 students. For the school, we were able to give them a taste of what we have to offer. Hopefully, they will come back.”

Anderson JC students Daniel Lee and Teo Ee Jun, who are taking courses in the Arts and Social Sciences faculty, may do just that.

Ee Jun, 17, who is in JC2, took the course on Chinese in Southeast Asia. He said it gave him a better insight into a subject close to his heart: the Chinese diaspora.

Daniel, 17, said after doing the course on Economy and Space, he is keen on enrolling in the NUS Arts and Social Sciences Faculty.

“It was a bit intimidating at first to be in tutorials with the other undergrads. But you soon forget that. I found it really interesting.”