Early start to university for NSmen

From next year, they can begin in April, not Aug, as NS is now shorter

By Liau Wy-Cin

NATIONAL servicemen will be allowed to begin university studies four months earlier than other students — and graduate sooner.

From next year, those who have a place booked at any of the three universities here can matriculate in April, instead of cooling their heels until August when the academic year starts.

The earlier start has been introduced as NS has now been shortened to two years. With the six-month reduction, NSmen complete their training around December or March, four to seven months before the universities open.

When NS was 2\frac{1}{2} years long, training for many ended by around mid-year and NSmen entered the universities soon afterwards.

The Singapore Management University, the National University of Singapore (NUS), and the Nanyang Technological University usually have about 4,300 NSmen with reserved places a year.

They are able to offer NSmen this option of matriculating early because of the way degree courses are structured.

Courses are split into modules, allowing some to be taken earlier than others.

So long as an undergraduate completes all the required modules, he is on track to a degree.

The universities said in a joint statement yesterday that, with the early start, the NSmen would be able to graduate one semester, or about three to four months earlier, if they wished.

However, NSmen who have places reserved in the NUS medicine, dentistry and law faculties will not be able to graduate earlier.

This is because these degrees are regulated by external professional bodies and follow a more fixed structure, said an NUS spokesman.

But they can still enrol for enrichment courses or be involved in research projects before the start of the academic year.

Women and foreign students will not be able to take up the early start option that begins in April as their applications for places at the universities are still being processed at that time.

Full-time national service-men headed for university next year are excited about the prospect of graduating earlier.

Mr Loh Jun Wei, 21, currently serving national service as a gun technician, has a place at NUS to study business. He intends to sign up for early modules.

"I already repeated a year in junior college, plus another two years in the army. I don't want to waste any more time."

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