SINGAPORE: The Singapore Management University (SMU) had its largest batch of graduates at its 4th Commencement Ceremony on Saturday.

And for the first time, it also conferred two honorary degrees.

Former Chief Justice Yong Pung How received the Doctor of Laws while philanthropist Dr Lee Seng Gee of the Lee Foundation was conferred the Doctor of Humane Letters.

It was a ceremony filled with pomp and splendour: the excited graduates about to go into the job market have been shown to be in high demand.

Internal surveys revealed that past graduates all found jobs within six months of graduation, with the top 20 percent earning an average of S$4,630.

The ceremony also saw honorary degrees, a tradition of universities worldwide since the 15th century, being conferred.

In his acceptance address, Mr Yong who has worn many hats, said he has had a strange career path, but had some words of advice.

Yong Pung How, Chairman, SMU School of Law Advisory Board, said: "One of these is the importance of making the right choices and keeping the right company. In Singapore today, companies compete for the best talents, and graduates vie for the best jobs. Different jobs suit different people, so it helps to know yourself when you make your personal choices.

"Regardless of which nature of work you choose, there are some things that you should look for in your employment. Chief amongst these is reputation of the institution. In particular, what is the reputation for integrity and ethical behaviour? Ultimately, we are known by the reputation of the people we choose as friends and colleagues, and also the company we work for."

SMU Chairman Ho Kwon Ping read out some lines from Dr Lee for the graduates.

Dr Lee could not be present because of a stroke, and had received his honorary degree in a private ceremony the previous evening.

Mr Ho said: "I take this opportunity to congratulate all who are graduating on this happy occasion, and say to you: embrace lifelong learning, be prepared to always learn new things with a global outlook, and give back to society when the time is ripe for you to do so."

SMU President Howard Hunter also announced that the Alumni Fund had reached S$100,000 which the government will match dollar for dollar.

And so, from this year, at least one scholarship will be awarded yearly to needy students.

Over at the University Cultural Centre, the National University of Singapore held its Commencement Dinner on Saturday evening.

The Commencement Dinner marks the conclusion of the university's commencement ceremonies.

Some 500 people, including guest of honour President SR Nathan, were at the dinner which provides an opportunity for new graduands, faculty, staff and alumni to get together for greater interaction.

The dinner is also part of the university's efforts to strengthen the sense of belonging among new graduates to its alma mater. - CNA/ch/ls