Fee freeze at 3 universities in view of GST hike

Move a surprise as NUS, NTU and SMU had signalled likely rise earlier

BY JANE NG

SINGAPORE’S three local universities will not raise tuition fees this year in view of the upcoming increase in goods and services tax (GST).

The news came as a pleasant surprise to university-bound students and their parents, particularly because the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU) have signalled that more fee hikes could be expected.

Last year’s increase saw fees at SMU go up by 15 per cent and those at NUS and NTU by 3 per cent.

The recent release of a list of government fees that will be frozen also did not include university tuition fees.

Taxi driver Phil Ng, whose 18-year-old daughter Angeline hopes to enrol in NUS this year, said he is relieved.

“Any amount I can save on fees is good news, since we will probably have to pay more for other things when GST goes up.”

At SMU, which has a locked-in fee scheme – students pay the same over four years – fees for incoming students will remain at $7,500 for the first year. But from the second year until they graduate, they will pay $8,300 a year.

This applies to all incoming students except those entering its new law programme, who will pay $9,000 a year.

Current students are not affected by the revision.

The other two universities do not have a locked-in fee scheme, but both are considering introducing one.

For this year though, NTU’s fees will remain at $6,110. Fees for returning national servicemen will be based on the year they were offered a place in the university.

At NUS, the annual tuition fee also stays at $6,110 for most courses, $7,570 for a music programme and $17,520 for a medicine or dentistry course.

An NUS spokesman said that while the costs of running the university’s programmes will rise with general inflation, NUS will absorb these increases.

“We will be launching several new and innovative educational programmes in the coming academic year, as well as continuing with ongoing efforts to further enhance existing programmes,” she said.

To ensure university education remains affordable, the universities have a range of financial help schemes for students. SMU also has a student employment unit to help students find part-time jobs off-campus to help with their educational expenses.

MP Amy Khor, who is a member of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, sees the fee freeze as a gesture on the part of the Government to assure Singaporeans that it is keeping an eye on costs.

“This especially applies to middle-income households, many of which may have children going to university. Some of them are worried that they may not get as big a help package, so this will definitely help to mitigate their worries,” she said.

janang@sph.com.sg