The big break

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"I now have the confidence and daring to set up my own business in the future."

Some 18 stores affiliated with entrepreneurial programmes or business and hospitality courses offer a range of goods and services, from make-up to mocha, in the polytechnic and university campus shops.

Some break even while others report as much as 30 per cent profit, aided in part by lower rentals and subsidies.

The money is ploughed back into the business, to pay for new stocks or overheads, or, in the case of Sasa affiliate MSC-Pretty Face, goes back to the suppliers.

Singapore and Nanyang Polytechnics have several stalls operated by students, for students, and Republic Polytechnic recently opened a gift shop called SUI!.

The big break is run by an extracurricular group in RP, and Fruchy by the SMU undergraduates who came up with its concept.

Ms Shermeen Tan, 21, who is one of Fruchy's owners, appreciates the help.

She pointed out: "It is hard for us to raise capital because we're still students."

The payback is that these businesses enjoy a "captive" market, whose needs they understand and capitalise on.

Even so, juggling school with business is no cakewalk. Several students find it a challenge to balance course work with the duties of running a business.

"Besides attending classes, doing presentations and sitting for tests, we also have to run Fruchy. It is hard work, it is not something which we can just take a break from," said 21-year-old Fruchy co-owner Shalini Arul.

Profits too are not as substantial as similar businesses elsewhere because the products are pitched at students and priced lower. This translates into smaller margins.

But the students do not mind. Ultimately, it's the learning experience that they are after.

SUI! store manager Kenneth Loke, 17: "I think it's good that schools are helping us by investing and setting up shops for us. It's better to learn about business here with their help first before taking risks in the outside world."