UNSW Asia students weighing their options

Petition group and those from second intake still dissatisfied

By Ho Ai Li

WHILE students from the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Asia ponder their options following the school’s shocking pullout on May 23, things appear all set for Myanmar student Phone Wai Myint.

The 18-year-old has decided to stay here to continue his engineering studies at the PSB Academy, which offers courses from another Australian university, the University of Newcastle.

Said the teenager: “I’ve got a lot of friends here and I don’t want to leave them.”

His schoolmate Donna Chew, 21, has also made up her mind. She interrupted her university studies once – when she gave up a place at the Singapore Management University (SMU) for the one at UNSW Asia – and does not want to go through that again.

So she is continuing her studies at UNSW’s Sydney campus, to which she can transfer credits from her semester here.

A UNSW spokesman said on Wednesday that it was too early to say how many students were moving to Sydney, but deputy vice-chancellor Richard Henry had reckoned last week that about a third of the 148 students would do so.

The students need to decide by the middle of this month for their visas to be processed in time for the mid-July start to the semester at the Sydney campus.

With the cost of the move a major factor, the 148 affected students have been offered UNSW scholarships to cover their studies Down Under – $22,000 for Singaporeans and $12,000 for foreigners.

A group of students who feel left out – without scholarships – are those who were due to join UNSW Asia in August, the second intake.

Mr Toh Chuan Zheng, 22, who was to have read computer engineering, said: “While I agree the pioneer batch should receive the most help, it does not mean that the August batch should be left out.

He is now waiting to hear from the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), after having been unsuccessful in his applications to the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University and SMU.

NTU said that it had received at least 70 applications. SMU has had about 60, and NUS, about 65 as of Tuesday. SIM said it had more than 20.

Meanwhile, James Cook University, another Australian school with a campus here, said it could take in all the 40 or so “foundation year” students who were attending UNSW Asia’s pre-university course at Temasek Polytechnic.

Amid these developments, a group of students who petitioned the university, the Ministry of Education and the Economic Development Board are not satisfied with the answers they have been given to their questions.

The group’s leader, Mr Jonathan Chan, 21, said compensation for students who chose not to go to Sydney had not been addressed.

“They have dangled the carrot of the scholarship and a lot of people will be inclined to take that,” he added.

hoail@sph.com.sg