SINGAPORE: All three public universities in Singapore will raise the tuition fees for the new intakes of students starting school in the next academic year.

Existing students and returning National Servicemen admitted earlier will not be affected by the fee increase.

For Nanyang Technological University (NTU), the fee hike is about 4 per cent. This means that incoming students at NTU will pay an annual fee of S$6,360, up from S$6,100 last year.

Most of the schools in National University of Singapore (NUS) will also limit the fee increase to about 4%. However, the Law and Business faculties at NUS will raise their fees by a higher amount.

On top of the fee hike, NUS and NTU will also implement differentiated pricing, where Singapore PRs pay 10 per cent more in tuition fees. International students will pay 50 per cent more compared to their Singaporean counterparts.

The two universities have also decided to implement a new fee structure called the "cohort-based" structure that is currently in place at the Singapore Management University (SMU).

This means tuition fees for all new undergraduates will be 'locked in' for their entire duration of studies. So for those entering NUS and NTU, they will pay a fixed amount of S$6,360 each year till they graduate.

For NUS, this applies to those in the Arts and Social Sciences, Computing, Design and Environment, Engineering and Science faculties. Fees for the other faculties will be higher.

Explaining the advantage of the "cohort-based" fee structure, Professor Dr Meng-Hwa Er, NTU's Associate Provost, said: "They (students) know exactly what to expect in terms of financial needs, so they can make the necessary arrangements for their university education."

"It definitely gives more predictability, and you're not caught unawares as to when fees will increase," said Donald Koh, president of NUS Students' Union.

For SMU courses, except for the law course, the cost is fixed at S$9,130. That's 10 percent more than what the previous cohort has to pay.

Fees for law students will be higher. At SMU, the jump is over 11 per cent, to S$10,050 for Singapore students. At NUS, it is 20 percent higher, at S$7,340.

Other than the increase in tuition fees, the hostel fees at NUS will also be raised by between S$10 and S$40 per week over the next three years.

NUS says this is because current fees are not enough to cover maintenance and upgrading costs.

The hike has caused some students to reconsider their options. "I think it's very expensive, I think it's not worth it. I'll probably take a cab to school instead of staying in a hostel," said a student.

Both NUS and NTU say the fee hikes are necessary to meet the increase in manpower and operating costs in order to continue providing a quality education.

NUS Provost and deputy president, Tan Eng Chye, said that the fee increase was delayed from last year due to the GST hike, but it could not be held off any longer.

He said: "70 per cent of our budget goes to salaries. Look at what the salary increase has been in the industry, 4 per cent and 5 per cent. The increase that we are looking for, it's quite clear that the fees only give us a small bit in terms of the increase.

"People would want to see their salary increase, so I think the same thing I would say is if you expect salary increase for yourself, you should also expect the university has to function, I have to give salary increase for my staff as well. So it's not unusual to expect a fee increase."

All the three universities have assured that needy students will not be denied a place as there will be enhanced financial aid packages to help them cope. - CNAiir