

Foreign unis bet big on a S'pore school

Private education initiative sees campuses sprout here to tap growing pool of Asian students

By **LEE U-WEN**
[SINGAPORE] Singapore's private education pie has become tempting enough to lure several foreign universities to plant their colours here.

Just this month, Scotland's 133-year-old Queen Margaret University became the first UK university to open a full campus overseas – a \$38 million facility located off Balestier Road.

In March, Perth's Curtin University of Technology announced it would do what fellow Australian institution, the University of New South Wales (UNSW), could not accomplish: set up a campus here by year's end.

While these are privately funded projects, the Economic Development Board (EDB) has been wooing the biggest names in education under its Global Schoolhouse initiative.

To date, 16 major foreign universities have become part of the six-year-old programme. Seven have set up a full campus here (see graphic), while others like New York's Cornell University and Japan's Waseda University have ties with one of the local universities to bring their courses to Singapore.

EDB's director of education and professional services Toh Wee Kiang said: "For many of these schools, their campus in Singapore is the only one in Asia. They clearly recognise the viability of Singapore in attracting students from around the world and offering them quality education."

With the global education market estimated to be worth US\$2.2 trillion, EDB is in talks to attract more top-notch institutions.

It has set itself a target of bringing in 150,000 foreign students to Singapore by 2015.

This will, in turn, create 22,000 jobs and boost the education sector's GDP con-

tribution from 1.9 per cent to 5 per cent.

Things move fast. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) was approached by EDB in 2004. The project was approved in February 2005. Building works on its two-storey campus at the National Library began soon after, and the school opened in August 2006.

The dean of its Singapore campus, Andy Nazarechuk, told BT: "In the education setting, it's probably one of the fastest 'handshake-to-opening' of a facility. Most times, it would take years of discussions and approval.

"On our part, we've always wanted to go overseas; Singapore was seeking the top schools to come here. So the timing was right and everyone agreed that (a Singapore campus) was the right thing to do."

Meanwhile, the SP Jain Center of Management – the first Indian international institute to be granted university status here – has "grown exponentially" in its first two years here, said Debashis Chatterjee, dean of its leadership centre.

But it has not been entirely smooth-sailing for EDB. Last year, UNSW sensationally pulled out of its plans to build a \$147 million campus in Changi South.

The varsity claimed it had lower-than-expected enrolment and argued that the financial risks would be too great if it continued the venture. This despite receiving \$17.3 million in grants and \$15 million in loans from the Singapore government.

Another earlier blow saw the UK's Warwick Uni-

versity pulling the plug in 2005 on its plans to operate a Singapore campus, citing concerns over academic freedom and possible research restrictions, among other issues.

Even outfits not courted by EDB are determined to make their presence felt. The 52-year-old Management Development Institute of Singapore has a comprehensive campus boasting facilities similar to what is offered at most universities.

Meanwhile, PSB Academy has partnerships with top foreign universities to offer students a chance to earn brand-name degrees without going abroad.

Some smaller players have taken a different route, either by setting up a "mini campus" in the form of renting office space –

Global schoolhouse

Seven foreign universities have set up a Singapore campus under EDB's programme

Chicago Graduate School of Business

■ Post-graduate institution opened its Penang Road campus in September 2000, offering executive MBAs

DigiPen Institute of Technology

■ USA's top school for game designers and animators opens its campus off Portsdown Road in September

ESSEC Business School

■ French institution that opened its campus at the National Library in 2005. Offers Essec MBA and carries out research

INSEAD

■ Its Ayer Rajah campus opened in 2000, offering executive and MBA education

New York University's Tisch School of the Arts

■ Opened its Kay Siang Road campus in Oct 2007, and received 300 applications for the inaugural class of 33 students

S P Jain Center of Management

■ Runs its flagship one-year Global MBA programme at the 28,000 sq m site of the former Institute of Dental Health since June 2006

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

■ Offers undergraduate and executive Masters degree courses in hospitality management at the National Library campus which opened in 2006

Compiled by BT

commonly in the Central Business District – to hold classes, or through tie-ups with a local agent that will help market their courses.

Last year, there were 1,200 of these private education organisations – a huge leap from just 150 in 1987.

Education leaders insist that the market is not saturated.

"The demand for higher education, for many years to come, will exceed the supply. If you have

quality players in the market, we can have many more good students coming from around the region," said Singapore Institute of Management chief executive officer Lee Kwok Cheong.

The industry is bracing itself for a major shake-up early next year, as private schools stand to face fines and other penalties if they flout new rules and minimum quality standards that will be set for their courses, teachers and facilities.

These measures, as part of the new Private Education Bill, also mean that they have to renew their registrations regularly, unlike the current one-off arrangement.

SIM's Mr Lee called this a "major step forward" on the government's part.

"I would continue to advocate that the bar be raised continuously, so that it's not so easy to simply set up a company, put a sign on the door and call itself a school," he said.



DRIVEN BY A SHARED PASSION TO RAISE THE BAR IN ULTIMATE LIVING. SC GLOBAL IS THE OFFICIAL REAL ESTATE PARTNER FOR THE "PORSCHE CARRERA CUP ASIA 2008", AND THE EVENT TITLE SPONSOR FOR THE "PORSCHE SC GLOBAL CARRERA CUP ASIA - SINGAPORE 2008" - AN OFFICIAL SUPPORT RACE AT THE 2008 FORMULA 1™ SINGTEL SINGAPORE GRAND PRIX.



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