

Coronavirus: All six local universities will let fresh graduates continue learning for free to access more jobs



MOE said that all graduates will also receive close support from their university career offices for their job search. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

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SINGAPORE - From May, 16,000 fresh graduates from the six autonomous universities will be able to take four continuing education and training (CET) modules offered by their alma mater for free.

In a joint statement on Friday (April 24), the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the six institutions said the move aims to help them access more opportunities across different job sectors.

"This is in recognition that with the uncertain economic outlook, some fresh graduates may want to continue their learning and pick up additional skills to complement the competencies acquired in their undergraduate years," the statement said.

All Singapore citizens and permanent residents graduating from full-time undergraduate degree courses this year will benefit. They can take their pick from

about 1,700 CET modules across areas such as advanced robotics, data analytics, data science, finance, professional communications, and systems thinking.

SkillsFuture Singapore will provide a subsidy of 70 per cent of the course fees for these graduates, with the universities subsidising the remainder.

The MOE said that all graduates will also receive close support from their university career offices for their job search.

Education Minister Ong Ye Kung said in a Facebook post on Friday: "Final-year students in our autonomous universities (AU) will be graduating amidst a very weak labour market. But I want to assure you that MOE and your AUs are fully behind you."

He encouraged graduates to take up the CET modules, to diversify their skills, even if they are unrelated to their disciplines, and consider traineeships to build industry-relevant skills and professional networks.

Fresh graduates will also have [up to 8,000 paid traineeship opportunities](#) through the SGUnited Traineeships Programme by the Ministry of Manpower and Workforce Singapore.

To date, more than 280 companies, including institutions of higher learning, have come forward to offer more than 4,000 traineeship places.

Under this programme, the Government provides 80 per cent of the training allowance. Details can be found on [this website](#).

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) on Friday also released more details of its new Covid-19 relief package announced earlier this week to help students who may be facing financial difficulties amid the outbreak.

All 5,700 final-year undergraduates this year will receive more credits for courses they can take as alumni, on top of the four CET ones they can take for free.

In a statement, NTU said that they will get an additional \$1,600 in alumni credits, which can be used to offset the fees for CET courses. The credits are valid until June 2021, and are on top of the existing \$1,600 in credits available to all alumni.

Graduates can also use the academic credits gained from selected CET courses and "stack" them towards a MiniMaster's Certificate, said the university.

A MiniMaster's programme has half the academic load of a full Master's programme, NTU said. The course credits earned from a MiniMaster's programme may count towards the requirements for a full Master's degree, which could be pursued at a later date.

The National Institute of Education at NTU already offers 12 such programmes in areas like drama education and e-learning instructional design, and the university will add more modules and courses in the coming months.

Separately, the National University of Singapore (NUS) said on Friday that it will launch 150 CET courses and more than 20 certificates of competency, like graduate certificates, for this year's graduating cohort.

The courses span areas such as data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning, finance and accounting, as well as business and management.

NUS said on Thursday that it is opening up 200 full-time jobs and 800 paid traineeship positions across its faculties and research institutes as well as in administration for graduates. Those who perform well in the traineeships, that can last up to a year, may be offered full-time positions.

In support of SGUnited Traineeships Programme, NTU also plans to open up several hundred paid traineeships for final-year undergraduates from all disciplines. The spots will be available across its colleges, schools, research centres and institutes, as well as corporate and joint laboratories.

NTU president Subra Suresh said: "We have intensified our efforts to engage employers and create job openings. Our graduating seniors are naturally worried about uncertainties in the current job market and we are pursuing all possible avenues to help them in their job search."

He added that the extra additional credits for alumni can help them earn the MiniMaster's Certificate, which "will give them a competitive edge in securing employment".

"It is often said that opportunities come to those who are prepared. We want to help the NTU undergraduate Class of 2020, graduating in this period of unprecedented challenges," he said.

The university is also setting aside \$270,000 to help its staff union members upgrade their skills by making use of training programmes of their choice.

A total of \$1 million will be available after taking into account matching support of up to \$30,000 from the NTU Branch of the Education Services Union, and government subsidies for approved courses.

NTU earlier this week announced other support measures including a [\\$2 million OneNTU Fund](#) to help needy students. Eligible students may get an interest-free advance of up to \$1,500 each, which should be reimbursed to the university within two years of graduation.

It also unveiled an NTU Priorities Fund, which was set up with a gift of \$100,000 from Professor Suresh and his wife, Mary. Recipients of the fund will pledge to "pay it forward" within two years of graduation and return the interest-free cash assistance to the university. The amount of assistance provided will be subject to the

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needs and circumstances of an applicant.

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