

# Rising number of tech grads set to plug gap in sector

## Local university graduates from tech-related courses slated to grow by two-thirds by 2022

Jolene Ang

The number of local university graduates from technology-related courses is set to grow by two-thirds by 2022, which experts say will go some way towards plugging the gap in the sector.

The intake for infocomm and digital technology courses across the six autonomous universities shot

up from 1,250 in 2015 to 2,050 last year, fresh data from the Ministry of Education (MOE) showed.

The intake for such courses in the five polytechnics has been consistent at 3,000 a year since 2015.

This comes amid a hunger for such talent as Singapore embarks on its Smart Nation journey, and companies ramp up hiring for roles such as data scientists and artificial intelligence specialists.

Salaries have jumped accordingly.

In the last three years, IT graduates consistently emerged as the top salary earners, according to joint graduate employment surveys by the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University and Singapore Management University. The Singapore University of Social Sciences joined the exercise last year.

Their median gross monthly salary surged from \$3,788 in 2016 to \$4,100 last year, putting them ahead of peers who studied engineering (\$3,600) and business (\$3,450).

Singapore Polytechnic lecturer

Dora Chua told The Straits Times that demand for local tech talent significantly outweighs supply, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Ms Chua, who teaches students about streaming analytics and the Internet of Things, said: "The talent pool is in its infancy - most are still in university and not yet in the workforce."

She added that the most talented are often drawn to multinationals, banks or fintech companies that can afford higher pay packages.

The crunch in the SME sector is keenly felt. Mr Kek Sei Wee, chief executive of local start-up IoTal-

ents, said these corporations may also have better employer branding, company culture and work environments than SMEs.

Mr Kek, whose firm specialises in matching tech talent to smaller firms, added: "Many SMEs turn to the foreign labour workforce as an alternative source, but it is not a viable solution for long-term growth."

"Many are also turning to alternatives such as outsourcing or offshoring some of their tech work that needs to be done."

Mr Evan Tan, chief of staff at tech start-up Holistics Software, said it has been difficult to find local talent that is a "good fit, with relevant experience in the tech industry".

His company, which specialises in data analytics and business intelligence, has staff in Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore.

But increasing the graduate talent pool need not be the only solution to ease the tech crunch, he added. Students who are not in tech courses but can show they have put in work to develop the relevant skills - even if it is just as a hobby - will also be

sought after. "It's not so much about age or academic credentials; being able to present a portfolio of projects and work counts for much more."

An MOE spokesman said schools and institutes of higher learning are trying to ensure their wider student populations have basic digital skills.

Ngee Ann Polytechnic information security and forensics graduate Devesh Logendran, 19, plans to take up a related tech course in a local university after national service.

He said: "As the threat of cyber attacks increases, there will be more demand for people with cyber security skills... Those who possess such skill sets will be in a very good position when it comes to finding jobs."

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