

Degrees or skills? ST Education Forum to debate issue

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With the number of university places increasing this year, more school leavers will have a shot at degree-level education.

There will be slightly over 16,000 places in the six publicly funded universities, despite a shrinking cohort size. This means the cohort participation rate will reach 37.5 per cent, up from 35 per cent last year.

Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung told The Straits Times that his ministry is on track to meeting the 40 per cent cohort participation rate announced six years ago.

Degrees have typically been asso-

ciated with better job prospects and higher salaries. Degree holders draw higher starting salaries compared with diploma holders, and the earnings gap widens over the years.


Those who cannot get into a local public university tend to look overseas or take the private school route.

However, in an age of technological advancements and disruptions in the workplace, degree holders are increasingly unemployed, or underemployed, in many economies.

The oversupply of degree holders has also had a dampening effect on graduate salaries.

In such a climate, does the conventional thinking that a degree

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equals success still hold true? Or should young people be focused on developing skills in fields relevant to the economy in this new age?

Singapore Management University (SMU) president Arnoud De Meyer said: "A university degree is more than just a piece of paper; it is more than just a way to get a good

job. University education equips students with the ability to learn how to learn; it stimulates their curiosity and develops the whole person for lifelong benefits."

Professor De Meyer will be part of a debate on the degrees versus skills issue at The Straits Times Education Forum, presented by SMU, on March 17.

The debate will be held at the SMU School of Law Building in Armenian Street.

Straits Times editor Warren Fernandez said: "This is a longstanding issue - do you need a degree to get ahead? - but it has added resonance today given the massive disruption across industries."

"It is pertinent to ask how best

our people should prepare for work in the future and whether degrees or skills will help them more?"

Along with SMU law dean Goh Yi-han, Prof De Meyer will be arguing against the motion: "You don't need a degree to succeed in life."

On the other side of the debate will be Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development education director Andreas Schleicher and SkillsFuture Singapore chief executive Ng Cher Pong.

The debate will be moderated by Mr Patrick Daniel, consultant to Singapore Press Holdings.

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EVENT INFORMATION

The Straits Times Education Forum on Degrees versus Skills is supported by the Singapore Management University

Date: March 17 (Saturday)

Time: 10am to 12pm
(Registration begins at 9am, guests to be seated by 9:50am)

Location: Singapore Management University School of Law Building, Basement 1 SMU Hall, 55 Armenian Street, Singapore 179943

Cost: Free for ST readers

Online registration:
<http://str.sg/st-education-forum-2018>
Limited seats are available.

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