



For Mr Wong, who left a job in solar film sales to sell lubricants to international shipping firms, nothing matches the satisfaction of closing a deal. He said: "It's very rewarding, the sense of accomplishment when you get them to change their minds." PHOTO: TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

PMETs get more help in career switch

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When Mr Max Wong was previously selling solar film to people looking for more shade on their windows, he also kept a lookout for a higher recurring income and a sector with room to grow.

In January this year, the 33-year-old took the plunge to become a trader at family firm Kims, where he now sells lubricant to international shipping companies.

Kims is among 23 companies committed to hiring new recruits under the Professional Conversion Programme (PCP) for careers in international trade, which was launched yesterday by IE Singapore. The scheme can potentially place and train 300 people in three years. It targets professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs), a group becoming more vulnerable to long-term unemployment amid a weakening global economy. It joins 33 conversion programmes in other sectors that train mid-career professionals to switch industries.

National Trades Union Congress assistant secretary-general Patrick Tay, welcoming the programme, said: "With the backdrop of layoffs announced this morning and PMEs being affected, (I) hope this PCP can help PMEs take on a second career in trading."

According to Manpower Ministry figures released yesterday, about 5,500 workers were laid off in the second quarter, a seven-year high.

IE Singapore chief executive Lee Ark Boon called international trade, which moves commodities

between countries, a growing sector with good career prospects.

International trade is the second largest service sector here, and is expected to create 15,000 jobs by 2020, he said. About 63 per cent of those in the sector are PMETs. He added that the sector's median wage is 10 per cent higher than the national median of close to \$4,000.

Acting Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung (Higher Education and Skills), the event's guest of honour, said: "In order to switch careers from one sector to another, you must be deep in one sector. Then if that sector is no more, another employer will say (about you), this is a person with determination and resilience. He has done it before in one sector, he will do it again."

The PCP was developed together with the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA), Singapore Management University's International Trading Institute and the International Chamber of Commerce Academy. WDA will fund 70 per cent of the course for local PMETs and up to 90 per cent of their pay, capped at \$4,000 a month, adding up to about \$61,000 in funding for each trainee.

For Mr Wong, it took some time to adjust to trading. While he could previously close a deal in days, it now takes him months just to get the client on board. But he said nothing matches the satisfaction of closing a deal. "It's very rewarding, the sense of accomplishment when you get them to change their minds."

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