

What students look for

ITE	Universities	Polytechnics	Private Education Institutions
Relevance	Support	Support	Teaching
Support	Campus	Computing	Support
Course-fit	Computing	Campus	Relevance
Teaching	Teaching	Teaching	Campus
Campus	Relevance	Relevance	Course-fit
Computing	Course-fit	Course-fit	Computing

Source: CSISG, Institute of Service Excellence at SMU

More than just delivering courses

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TO keep up with student demands, private education institutions here will need to go beyond engaging students and delivering relevant courses, the latest Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) report suggests.

And the latest results might add some urgency. While students at some local universities, polytechnics and ITE reported improved satisfaction, those at private education institutions were significantly less happy than they were a year ago.

Private education institutions' CSISG score fell from 72.2 points a year ago, to 66.3 this year. The public education sub-sector's score held steady at 72.8, as the more satisfied students at the Institute of Technical Education, Singapore Management University, National University of Singapore and Singapore Polytechnic offset those at other institutions who had become less satisfied.

Institute of Service Excellence at SMU (ISES) director Caroline Lim said: "In

the past, you might be able to get away with ensuring that the courses are relevant to the students, but students these days may be expecting more features, such as WiFi, the ease of the institution's public transport system, campus life, and more."

She noted that the private education institution sector's satisfaction scores for campus administration declined the most, followed by satisfaction with student support and computing matters.

In CSISG's survey, students were asked to rank the importance of various aspects of their student life.

Students at private education institutions ranked teaching – meant to capture the quality, dedication and mutual respect exhibited by teaching staff – as the most important factor. This was followed closely by student support, relevance of courses, campus administration, course-fit and lastly, computing.

Ms Lim says that for both the public and private sub-sectors, the survey found that student support, which refers to financial, career, and emotional sup-

port for students, is consistently of high importance to students.

"(These institutions) should improve on what's most relevant to the students. There are surely a lot of attributes at play when you look at the quality of private education. But each one has their own group of students with different needs and expectations . . . It would be unproductive to try to improve across all these attributes."

In an effort to better meet students' needs and expectations, schools have adopted techniques such as student surveys, collecting feedback on instructors' and making themselves part of a network that keeps up with global standards, she says.

But she also adds that private education institutions' poorer showing this round could be attributed in part to a change in how the survey of its students was conducted.

This is the first year that ISES, which compiles the CSISG report on various sectors each quarter, is using an online questionnaire instead of face-to-face interviews. This has had the ad-

vantage of broadening their sample size from 500 to 2,400. But respondents to online surveys tend to display stronger views – whether positive or negative.

ISES academic director Marcus Lee thinks that this works especially well for the education sector. "Students are very comfortable online. It's not a typical industry where if you do online, the old people all disappear, because fewer old people are comfortable doing online surveys."

In future, ISES wants to reduce its reliance on face-to-face interviews in favour of online polls, which they deem more sustainable and less intrusive.

After all, the mode of survey chosen affects how honest people are with their answers, says Mr Lee. "If you interview me now, and you ask me stuff about what I think about some provider, I will unconsciously tend to be agreeable and say it's nice."

But someone equally motivated will be more honest with his or her answers when they are looking at it from the privacy of their own home without any time pressure, he says.