

Unis to offer more stints with start-ups overseas



SMU students (from left) Zhang Qianruixue, 23; Nicholas Han, 23; Lee Teck Hui, 25; and Lee Jinq Yi, 24, took part in the school's Entrepreneurship Immersion Programme this year. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

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Two local universities – Singapore Management University (SMU) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) – have introduced programmes over the past year to allow students to intern at start-ups overseas while taking classes at partner educational institutions.

These follow the National University of Singapore's Overseas Colleges (NOC) programme, which operates on a similar model and has been in place for over a decade. Many of its alumni have gone on to found successful tech companies, such as Carousell and PlayMoolah.

Mr Nicholas Han, 23, was one of the 21 students in the pioneer batch of SMU's Entrepreneurship Immersion Programme, which lasted 10 to 12 weeks during the school's summer term. He picked up valuable soft skills from his internship at Rialto, a Belgian real-estate start-up. He saw how the founder focused on building a relationship with clients, instead of talking shop immediately. "When you create a connection with someone, you are more likely to generate a response," said Mr Han, a third-year student.

NUS plans to increase its annual intake of students from 200 to 300, and expand the number of locations in the programme from six to eight in the next few years.

NTU, meanwhile, will be sending its pilot intake of students under its Overseas Entrepreneurship Programme (OEP) to China and Britain next year.

This comes on the back of recommendations by the Entrepreneurship Review Committee and the shift towards entrepreneurship in the "new economic order", said Dr Lim Jui, chief executive officer of NTU Innovation and NTUitive, NTU's innovation and enterprise company.

The Entrepreneurship Review Committee was set up in 2013 to boost the start-up scene here.

Forty students have applied to join the OEP, under which they will intern for a year in a start-up while studying at a partner university, such as Imperial College in London or Tsinghua University in Beijing. NTU hopes to grow its yearly intake to at least 200 by 2020.

SMU, too, is hoping to send more students abroad for its entrepreneurship scheme. Over the summer, its students were attached to Emory University in Atlanta in the US and iMinds in Flanders, Belgium, an infocomm technology research lab. They were also matched with start-ups in both places.

Next year, SMU will be introducing two new locations – China and India. It hopes to send 40 to 60 students on the programme.

Third-year SMU student Lee Teck Hui, 25, relished the creative aspects of his internship with Bioscape Digital, an American health tech start-up. "Instead of adhering to the standard operating procedure if there was a problem, we got to experiment even if we weren't sure if it would work," he said.

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