

SIM grads find jobs easily, but earn less

Peers from public varsities are paid several hundred dollars more: Survey

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GRADUATES from Singapore's biggest and best-known private school land jobs easily, with most receiving two or more offers.

But the first employment survey carried out by the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) shows that they are typically paid several hundred dollars a month less than their peers from the publicly funded universities.

Seven hundred graduates were polled by the global education arm of the institute, which runs degree courses in partnership with overseas schools.

SIM's other arm is UniSIM, which runs part-time degree courses for working adults. Its graduates were not covered by this survey.

More than nine in 10 found a job within six months of completing their course last year, with most receiving at least two offers and a third getting three or more.

Ten per cent ended up being

employed by the Government, mostly at statutory boards such as the Central Provident Fund Board and the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore.

The graduates' typical monthly starting salary in both the private and public sectors ranged from \$2,400 to \$2,600 - significantly lower than that earned by those from the public universities.

By contrast, the average monthly salary among Singapore Management University graduates last year was \$3,388, while Nanyang Technological University graduates got \$3,152 and those at the National University of Singapore earned \$3,112.

Mr Lee Kwok Cheong, who heads the institute's global education arm, said the discrepancy could be due to the fact that it is not a government institution.

"This is peculiar to Singapore, where when it comes to higher education, only the government-run institutions are seen to be of high quality," he said.

He added that although the institute has a good record, several



The survey by SIM shows that its graduates' typical monthly starting salary ranged from \$2,400 to \$2,600 last year, compared to \$3,388 for SMU graduates, \$3,152 for NTU graduates and \$3,112 for National University of Singapore graduates. PHOTO: MARK CHEONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

private schools have been exposed over the years for running sub-standard programmes.

"Unfortunately, we are tarred with the same brush."

Mr Lee said another reason

could be that employers were unfamiliar with its model of education, which involves partnerships with foreign universities.

"We need to reach out more to explain how we ensure that the

overseas university programmes we run here are as rigorous as the ones run in the home country."

He pointed out that one indication of quality was the performance of its students taking up University of London degree courses. Last year, 117 of them got first-class honours and another 414 graduated with second upper honours.

The Straits Times asked four companies which employ graduates from the institute why they paid them less. Only one agreed to comment, on condition of anonymity.

Its human resources manager said private firms took their cue from the public sector. "It's known that some government ministries and stat boards, if they do hire them, put them on a different scale," he said. "So, companies would use that as an excuse to pay Singapore Institute of Management grads less."

Several firms, including HSBC Singapore and SMRT, said they

place them on the same scale as other graduates. And once in, employees rise through the ranks depending on how well they perform. Some said they have noticed special qualities in those who graduate from the institute.

Mr Phan Yoke Fei, vice-president of human resource at SMRT, said: "They tend to be job-ready. They are also hard workers willing to take on additional responsibilities, have a good work attitude and tend to stay on with the company. I guess it comes from being the underdogs, having to fight harder to have an edge over their peers."

The Public Service Division would say only that it has a "good number of civil servants" who got their degrees through the private schools.

The Education Ministry said its teachers have qualifications from many universities but did not say whether private school graduates are placed on a lower salary scale.

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Lack of interest from public sector

■ Mr S.L. Tan, 25, first-class honours graduate in business:

"I was really keen on joining the civil service... but I didn't even get an interview.

"Then when I applied to a couple of big companies, they offered me a job but at a much lower salary than what my friends from NUS and NTU were getting.

"I finally took a job with a company that paid me \$300 less. But the HR manager said if I proved myself in three months, he would up my salary - and he did."

■ Ms A. Goh, second upper honours (Bachelor of Arts) graduate who applied to teach. She now works in a publishing company:

"I applied to teach twice but was not called for an interview. I sought advice from my former school principal and was told to try for an allied educator position, for which you need only a polytechnic diploma."