

Govt help to nurture core of local talent

It is co-funding scholarships to help industry develop bright Singaporeans

By **MATTHIAS CHEW**

THE future competitiveness of the Singapore economy lies in strengthening the core of local talent in key sectors, said Education Minister Heng Swee Keat yesterday.

In this regard, private-sector companies, such as home-grown footwear retailer Charles & Keith, which cannot draw in top young talent on their own have been given a boost by the Government.

Yesterday, 20-year-old John Ser became the first Charles & Keith scholarship holder under a new programme in which the Government will pay part of the cost of his business management degree at the Singapore Management University.

Dubbed the Singapore-Industry Scholarship, 90 such awards were given out yesterday by the Government in partnership with 27 private-sector companies and a statutory board.

Launched in February, the scholarship pays for undergraduate studies at local universities and the Singapore Institute of Technology.

Scholarship holders have to serve a four-year bond with private-sector companies upon graduation. These include local companies such as food and beverage firm Sakae Holdings and engineering group Boustead, as well as foreign companies like chip-maker Infineon and mining giant BHP Billiton.

The various industries were identified by the Education Ministry and the Economic Development Board. One selection criterion was that the firms had to have good human resource practices.

In a speech at the scholarship ceremony, Mr Heng said that a stronger core of Singaporean talent would put the Republic in a better position to anchor a key range of industries.

Having a pool of talented people,

the minister added, would draw in industry investors, who would then create a "multiplier effect" that would create more jobs - perhaps even in unrelated fields.

With the strong core of Singaporean talent in place, Mr Heng said, the nation can embark on a "Singapore plus plus" strategy. "The first plus is to complement our core with a right mix of global talent, to enable us to build the best multi-disciplinary team," he said. "The second plus is to ensure that Singaporeans have global cultural literacies to interact with people across cultures."

He added: "By taking a three-pronged approach of developing individual talent, creating new sources of competitive advantages at the national level, and deepening and broadening the way we view talent, we can enable all Singaporeans to earn a 'Team Singapore premium'."

Sakae's chief executive Douglas Foo said the scholarship "is definitely a step towards attracting top talent to the retail and services sector, which has a lot of opportunities for growth."

National Healthcare Group chief executive Chee Yam Cheng welcomed the chance to train would-be healthcare administrators from a younger age. He said: "We don't always get

the brightest, so we want to project (our recruitment) earlier."

The scholarship recipients were selected from a pool of more than 1,000 applicants. The programme includes internships and professional development schemes with their selected firms during their studies.

Mr Heng also announced that the scholarship would be extended to Singaporeans who are second- or third-year undergraduates here or abroad.

Including students studying overseas would give them "access to the exciting opportunities that the Singapore economy presents", he said.

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- Complement this with talent from around the world
- Develop Singaporeans' ability to connect across cultures

- Education Minister Heng Swee Keat (below)

