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Headline: SMU Academy offers 'stackable' courses for working adults

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Working professionals may be aware of the need to upgrade their skills in an increasingly volatile economy, but find it hard to pursue full-time degree programmes.

But those who have to juggle work and study now have more options.

The Singapore Management University's (SMU) lifelong learning unit, SMU Academy, which was launched last Wednesday, offers a range of modular courses - with credits that can be "stacked up" towards graduate certificates, diplomas or master's degrees.

These modules are offered in growth areas such as financial tech-

nology and information security.

Including SMU, all five autonomous universities (AUs) here - the others being the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore University of Technology and Design, and Singapore Institute of Technology - have set up lifelong learning units.

At the launch of the SMU Academy, Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung, who earlier called for universities to ramp up bite-size programmes, said the new academy is on the right track.

"It may seem like a straightforward matter that AUs simply need to extend their existing courses to adult learners... Unfortunately the

philosophy and science behind teaching a student and teaching an adult learner is vastly different," said Mr Ong.

He said it is important to have such bite-size programmes for a successful school for lifelong learning. Other crucial features for success include industry relevance and keeping admissions open to whoever needs the skills, he said.

SMU Academy currently offers 83 courses, ranging from one-day courses to modules conducted over a few sessions on weekday evenings and weekends. The prices of the courses start from \$850, before government subsidies such as SkillsFuture credits.

The academy aims to eventually

run 140 courses, offering about 2,800 training places in total, by the end of March next year.

One of the master's degrees that students can "stack up" with accumulated module credits is SMU's Master of Science in Communication Management. Students who have taken individual modules under the scheme - such as in digital media or digital marketing - can take additional modules within five years to make up a master's degree. A total of 21 modules is needed for this degree, in addition to the completion of a capstone project.

SMU Academy executive director Lim Lai Cheng said the academy will focus on courses in areas where SMU has "inherent strengths", such

as financial services. But Dr Lim is also keen to collaborate with lifelong learning units at other universities. SMU's city campus makes it accessible for working adults, she said.

Ms Clarinda Choh, 45, who is on sabbatical leave from her job as the director of the Gifted Education Programme at Hwa Chong Institution, is using SkillsFuture funding for a graduate certificate in communication management and strategy at SMU Academy.

"The attraction of the course lies in the fact that it is 'stackable', and the structure makes life very easy for those of us who have other commitments, like family or work," she said.

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BALANCING COMMITMENTS

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MS CLARINDA CHOH, who is pursuing a graduate certificate at SMU Academy.

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