

RP graduates benefit from internships

They no longer lose out in job race; some even win scholarships for university

Jane Ng

Mr Yeo Li Pheow faced a torrent of feedback when he started work as Republic Polytechnic's (RP's) principal in 2008.

Former students and employers said graduates from the poly lacked work experience gained through internships.

They lost out when it came to competing for jobs with graduates of other polytechnics, or faced a steep learning curve when they landed a job.

The problem was that the polytechnic did not have industry attachments for its students, and that set them back in picking up skills and experience for the workplace.

Employers preferred graduates who could hit the ground running, thanks to exposure to working life during their polytechnic days.

"Feedback from earlier batches told us that internships mattered, because when they went to work after studies, they didn't know

what to expect and felt disadvantaged," said Mr Yeo.

As Mr Kurt Wehinger, general manager of the Marina Mandarin Singapore hotel, put it, students have a better understanding of what they have been learning in school through an internship and it gives them an advantage when it comes to career advancement.

In 2009, Mr Yeo introduced internships and made changes to the curriculum so that courses would be more industry-focused. Today, Republic Polytechnic students start preparing for industry from the moment they enter the institution.



ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Republic Polytechnic principal Yeo Li Pheow introduced internships and made changes to the curriculum so that courses would be more industry-focused.

First-year students are taught how to create a portfolio of their achievements. All students have a mentor – a faculty member – and learn to write a resume and prepare for interviews. By their third year, all go on an internship or attachment lasting between 16 and 24 weeks.

To keep the curriculum relevant, every school in the polytechnic draws on the advice of industry partners.

“We want employers to give feedback to help us fine-tune the curriculum so when graduates hit the industry, they can be useful assets from Day One,” said Mr Yeo.

In 2009, the polytechnic sent 10 per cent of its students on internships of between eight and 18 weeks. Now, all third-year students go on internships. Last week, its biggest batch of 4,060 students graduated, almost all of whom have work experience with the polytechnic’s industry partners which now number 1,200 companies.

Along with worthwhile internships came job offers, overseas stints and scholarships to do degrees, said Mr Yeo. These opportunities are important, as

45 per cent of Republic Poly’s students are on financial assistance schemes.

Mr Yeo said a sign that he knew the polytechnic was on the right track was when companies asked for more students as interns, or offered to sponsor scholarships and facilities.

New graduate Benny Yip, 26, said his internship led to a job offer and a scholarship for a university degree. He graduated last week with a diploma in health management and promotion. He did an internship at Alliance Healthcare Group which was impressed enough

to sponsor his studies for a degree in social science at the Singapore Management University.

Mr Yip, who is doing medical programme support at the company, said school modules helped him become familiar with the jargon used in the industry.

“As a result, my learning curve was smooth and I could pick up the ropes fast,” said the younger son of a clerk and dispatch driver.

Industry-ready grads

“We want employers to give feedback to help us fine-tune the curriculum so when graduates hit the industry, they can be useful assets from Day One.”

MR YEO LI PHEOW, on how every school in Republic Polytechnic draws on the advice of industry partners

 janeng@sph.com.sg

 [facebook.com/ST.JaneNg](https://www.facebook.com/ST.JaneNg)