

# Demand rising for higher education

But as more varsities go abroad, there will be failures: SMU president

By AMELIA TENG

FOUR new universities, with space for 25,000 students each, will have to be built every week for the next 20 years.

This is assuming the world's population grows to nine billion, with a fifth opting for higher education, said Singapore Management University (SMU) president Arnoud De Meyer yesterday.

Speaking during a plenary session at the inaugural World Academic Summit, he used these estimates to show just how quickly demand for universities is rising.

And this is why more universities are venturing out of their home countries and setting up campuses abroad, or starting joint programmes with local universities.

"Why do we set up campuses abroad? Because that's where the students are," he said.

For the parent university, it makes business sense. And the host country gets fresh expertise, he explained.

Agreeing, fellow speaker Professor Tony Chan, president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, cited figures showing that there are over 200 degree-granting foreign branches of universities, many of them in Asia.

But as this trend grows, Prof De Meyer noted that "there will be a lot of failures".

Without naming them, he referred to foreign institutions that have come to Singapore and left, due to "difficult business models".

Last year, the New York University said it was closing down the Singapore campus of its film school, the Tisch School of the Arts, due to financial issues.

Another example is the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, which said this year that it is moving its executive education programme from Singapore to Hong Kong, to be nearer to the booming Chinese economy.

Prof De Meyer said that it takes hard work and well-thought-out implementation to overcome such challenges. For instance, prestigious institutions have to find ways to "preserve" their brand at overseas campuses.

He added that the "international capabilities" of university leaders must also improve, and faculty members should not just be "a portfolio of passports" but people with global mindsets.

Yesterday's three sessions saw experts discussing trends in higher education, like online learning, the need for universities to collaborate, and the increasing mobility of students.

The Straits Times is the official media partner of the three-day event, which ends today.

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