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Headline: Fast-track your higher degree: New pathways for post-polytechnic, ITE diploma holders

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SMU Academy's new partnership with the five local polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education enables a faster, more seamless pathway to postgraduate degrees



With Singapore deepening its push to build a digitally confident workforce, SMU Academy has partnered all five polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) to help their post-diploma and ITE diploma holders respectively, to upskill and seize new opportunities in a fast-changing economy.

For the first time, eligible post-polytechnic diploma graduates can have their prior learning, as well as relevant work experience, formally recognised for module exemptions. ITE diploma holders can also have their prior work experience taken into account for application to a higher degree programme.

This milestone partnership shortens the journey to postgraduate-level study by creating clearer, more direct pathways that reflect a skills-first approach to education.

Professor Lily Kong, president of Singapore Management University (SMU) says: “In a world of constant change, standing still is the greatest risk. Learners must have a positive and proactive mindset towards lifelong learning, and institutions must collaborate more deeply than ever to create seamless pathways across different stages of learning.”

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Paving the way to a higher degree

Before this partnership, there were no established education pathways from ITE and the polytechnics that led directly to a postgraduate qualification. Now, polytechnic advanced and specialist diploma (post-diploma) holders get up to four module exemptions when applying for SMU Academy's Industry Graduate Diplomas (IGDs) and up to six for Industry Practice Master of Digital Economy (IPMDE) programmes, in recognition of modules they have already taken at a post-polytechnic level.



This means they avoid repeating modules and can progress faster into postgraduate-level study. It also creates, for the first time, a direct progression pathway for ITE diploma holders into a higher degree programme.

Those with relevant professional experience may also qualify for up to two additional exemptions, cutting down the time and cost needed to complete their studies.

Mr Jack Lim, executive director of SMU Academy explains that the partnership is a game changer in adult education. He says: "By working with polytechnics and ITE, and creating new models of learning continuity, we enable polytechnic post-diploma holders to fast-track their postgraduate-level studies at SMU Academy. At the same time, we are opening a new pathway for ITE diploma graduates, so they too can progressively advance towards postgraduate-level qualifications."

With this new partnership, ITE diploma graduates also have a shorter pathway to work towards a higher degree programme.

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Previously, the standard route was long-drawn, requiring a polytechnic diploma, then a bachelor's degree, before enrolling in a higher degree programme.

While there are currently no exemptions for ITE diploma holders, those with 10 years of relevant work experience can now be considered for admission to the IPMDE programme under this new framework, with no need for any bridging course.



Learning at their own pace

The new framework will take effect from the August 2026 intake onwards, with a projected intake of around 100 learners annually.

As the courses are stackable, industry professionals, working adults and post-polytechnic or ITE diploma holders looking to upgrade or switch careers can enjoy flexibility in their learning.

Instead of taking an extended time off work, which may have an impact on their finances and career, learners have the option to take modules as their schedule permits, so long as they finish the IGD within two years and the IPMDE within three years.

Eligible learners can enjoy up to 90 per cent SkillsFuture funding, and may also use their SkillsFuture Credit to offset the remaining course fees. Those aged 40 and above are able to further offset up to \$4,000 through the SkillsFuture Credit (Mid-Career). This is applicable for all SkillsFuture funded skills-based modules.

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Given the strong demand for digital skills across industries, this current partnership focuses on programmes within the digital economy suite. However, there are plans to broaden the framework over time to include other domains of study.

Future expansions will be guided by market relevance and evolving industry needs, ensuring that new pathways remain aligned with Singapore's workforce transformation priorities and the broader SkillsFuture agenda.

To find out more or register your interest for the August 2026 intake, visit [SMU Academy](#).