

40% of Singaporean youth to have university degrees by 2020

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Singapore has unveiled two new universities to raise higher education participation rate to 40% from 27% by the end of the decade.

The number of part time students enrolled in higher education is set to rise to 10% from the current 7%.

The Singapore PM Lee Hsien Loong announced the measure in his National Day speech on 26 August. Mr. Lee argued education remains a “key response to the changing world” as he announced SIT and the Singapore Institute of Management University (UniSIM) would be upgraded to become Singapore’s fifth and sixth universities, offering applied as well as part-time degrees.

In addition both institutions are expected to increase the number of places so that 50% of students from each cohort in Singapore is enrolled in higher education.

Senior Minister of State (Education and Information, Communications and the Arts) Lawrence Wong assured that the Singapore economy can absorb more university graduates. "Going forward, clearly, we can accommodate more university graduates," said Mr Wong.

The Minister also said that the government will not “compromise” on the quality of higher education as a result of widening access to university education. We know that we should not expand just for the sake of providing an opportunity to get a paper chase, this is not about getting a degree as a piece of paper (but) building (a) skilled workforce that can meet the needs of the economy."

However, analysts from the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) have warned that it is difficult to predict whether the Singapore economy can support more graduates. A lot depends not on the rate of growth but the drivers of that growth. If we shift to higher productivity driven growth and maintain our competitiveness in diverse areas, it is quite likely that Singapore graduates will find work easily," Manu Bhaskaran from the IPS said.