

# THE BUSINESS TIMES

## WEEKEND

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# BACK TO SCHOOL

After several high-profile exits in the foreign university scene, is the Singapore global schoolhouse back in business?

**BRUNCH 9-11**

A large illustration on a light blue background. It features several stylized, colorful books (red, white, and blue) scattered around. In the center, there is a green map of Singapore. The text 'BACK TO SCHOOL' is written in large, bold, blue letters at the top. Below it, a paragraph of text asks if the Singapore global schoolhouse is back in business. Underneath that, 'BRUNCH 9-11' is written in red. At the bottom right of the illustration, it says 'BT ILLUSTRATION: BILLY KER'.

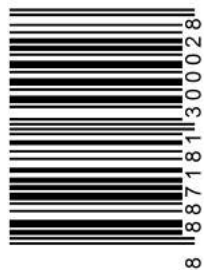
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## BRUNCH

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# BACK TO SCHOOL



After several high-profile exits in the foreign university scene, is the Singapore global schoolhouse back in business?

**BY ANNABETH LEOW**

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WISS university Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne's planned Singapore campus was given EduTrust certification – valid for four years – in June. At first blush, the institution is just one more of the over-100 EduTrust-accredited private schools in Singapore. But the award, given by SkillsFuture Singapore's Committee for Private Education, is a little more unusual – because EHL's Singapore outpost is not even up and running yet. Its first cohort of 60 is expected only in late 2021.

The upcoming Singapore branch is a global move for the hospitality-focused university, which has a main campus in Lausanne and also runs the Swiss School of Tourism and Hospitality in Passugg, near Davos. >>>



BRUNCH

**Twenty-two Singaporeans** are already studying at EHL in Lausanne. EHL charges international students about 162,000 Swiss francs (S\$227,900) for a four-year bachelor's degree, compared with some 77,200 Swiss francs for citizens. Its Singapore course fees have not been announced.

On the decision to expand, Maxime Medina, EHL's chief operating officer and deputy chief executive, says that "it could be that the Asian campus is more attractive for non-Asian students" craving industry experience in the region.

"Maybe we'll have more Western students going to Asia, and vice versa. And we will build an exchange system – a semester of exchange – between those two," he tells *The Business Times*.

Almost a decade after a string of high-profile exits dented Singapore's hopes of becoming an education hub, watchers might ask whether the Global Schoolhouse is back in business – and how survivors have fared where others failed.

**School holidays?**

Singapore policymakers launched a "Global Schoolhouse" project to great fanfare in 2002, to raise the education sector's economic profile.

Growth targets included raising education's share of the economy from 3.6 per cent to 5 per cent by 2015, while tripling the number of foreign students to 150,000. That would involve wooing overseas schools and "large numbers of international students", George Yeo, then Minister for Trade and Industry, noted in 2003.

But these goals predated a global financial crash, as well as popular backlash against immigration that came to a head with the Government's Population White Paper in 2013.

The education landscape was also marred by a rash of retreats by well-known schools, which often cited enrolment and financial difficulties.

Most notable was the University of New South Wales' shock departure in 2007 – barely three months after the first cohort started classes – while New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Asia pulled the plug in 2012.

And the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which had offered a hotel administration degree course here, ended its tie-up with the Singapore Institute of Technology in 2013.

That same year, the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business moved to Hong Kong after more than a decade in the Republic, in spite of its healthy finances and student base here. Hong Kong won out for proximity to mainland China.

But, since the financial crisis, the Global Schoolhouse initiative has focused on industry-relevant capabilities and holding on to talent, Lim Hng Ki-ang, then Minister for Trade and Industry, told Parliament in 2012.

"Going forward, while the education sector remains an important part of our economy, the Global Schoolhouse initiative will emphasise quality of education and relevance to the economy, and not student numbers or (gross domestic product) share."

In fact, foreign student numbers have fallen over the years, from 89,400 in 2012 to 65,600 last year. Yet, despite the setbacks, studying locally for foreign degrees remains popular. Some 10,200 students graduated from full-time "external" bachelor's degree programmes at private schools in the 12 months to April last year – from around 6,600 in 2001. That's not counting post-graduate qualifications, such as master's degrees.

Course fees range widely among private education institutions offering external degree pro-



Class in session at the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne, which now has 22 Singaporean students enrolled.

grammes – from under S\$20,000 to about S\$60,000 for a bachelor's degree. In comparison, the local universities' fees range from S\$24,000 to S\$40,000 without government subsidies.

But degree holders from private schools score permanent jobs at about half the rate of peers from the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Social Sciences.

Last year, 48.2 per cent of such graduates from private schools held full-time jobs six months after graduation, against 81.2 per cent of public university counterparts, official statistics show.

Ministry of Trade and Industry economists have also noted that public university graduates

earn about 28 per cent more in starting pay, even after taking factors such as academic and socio-economic profiles into account.

"Differences in institutional and course quality, as well as potential signalling effects and employers' perceptions of the degrees could have contributed to the wage gap," they wrote in a report in 2017, while adding that prospective students should weigh issues such as course fees and the opportunity cost of earnings lost during studies.

Lee Chew Chiat, government and public services industry leader at Deloitte South-east Asia, tells BT that he does not rule out re-entry of former operators or the arrival of new players, but advises that business models "must give students varied

## Providing the right training for the labour-intensive hospitality sector

By Annabeth Leow

EDUCATION providers here are tailoring courses to address industry needs, including through tie-ups with overseas schools.

For example, the Singapore Institute of Technology directly offers degrees such as the DigiPen Institute of Technology's video game design credential or the Culinary Institute of America's bachelor of business administration in food business management – with specialisations in either culinary arts or baking – on top of joint and in-house programmes.

Right now, the Republic is also champing at the bit for hotel staff.

The headcount in accommodation and food services has grown steadily in recent years, to 256,100 as at end-2018, up by 11.1 per cent since 2013 – even as the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) expects this year's tourism receipts to grow by between 1 per cent and 3 per cent year on year.

Still, there is concern that the labour pipeline is not keeping pace with demand: Chan Yit Foon, senior vice-president of human resources at Mar-

**"Today, we have more than 4,000 partners all over the world for internships, and a certain percentage – I would say maybe 30 or 40 per cent – are in Asia."**

Maxime Medina, chief operating officer and deputy CEO, Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne

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ina Bay Sands (MBS), tells *The Business Times* that the integrated resort needs around 200 interns a year – but applications have been falling.

MBS has more than 10,000 staff members, and needs to add 1,000 by year-end as new eateries open. Job openings include bartenders, sous chefs, butlers and slot attendants.

More workers must also come on board as MBS embarks on a S\$4.5 billion expansion that will build a fourth hotel tower with 1,000 new rooms. "We actually go out to the polytechnics... or even the tertiary institutions, to obtain interns," says Ms Chan. "We're finding it more and more challenging, and they told us there's also a reduction in their enrolment for hospitality courses."

To bring workers into the hospitality sector, MBS has hosted more than 20 participants from the Earn and Learn work-study scheme since 2016, in areas such as hotel operations, human resources, and convention services.

Other industry initiatives in place include the Training Industry Professionals in Tourism grant for employers, notes Ong Huey Hong, STB dir-

exposure to different cultures and markets".

"Embedding a strong and expansive alumni network could be a good proposition too, and providing channels that enable the students to learn beyond their school years would be of added value."

**A local touch**

Singapore's newfound emphasis, as Mr Lim and other policymakers indicated, is on bringing in courses that are relevant to Singapore's economy.

Along those lines, education firm Kaplan Singapore, which offers degree courses from foreign partners, set up in 2017 advisory boards for six sectors – such as healthcare and retail – to bring programmes in line with industry skills needs.

Meanwhile, Australia's James Cook University (JCU) noted in its annual report that expanding its range of courses here is a near-term priority. JCU, which opened here with 50 students in 2003, had an enrolment of 3,500 by last year in the Republic – two-fifths of which were Singaporeans.

"Market research is conducted to understand the potential of course offerings, which are built upon university strengths and industry needs," says marketing director Andrew Chew. As an example, he notes that JCU "is strong in aquaculture, and there are growing opportunities for this field" – so it offers an aquaculture major for its bachelor's in business and environmental science.

Curtin University, which also hails from Down Under, has a campus here too, with other Asian operations in Malaysia, Dubai and Mauritius.

It originally offered just business courses here, but has since built up a focus in health sciences as well. Curtin also said in its last annual report that, while "nursing continues to be a very competitive course", new programmes are rolled out to suit Singapore's national development aims.

There is even a Singapore curriculum committee and an advisory board for the undergraduate and postgraduate nursing programmes, Curtin Singapore pro-vice-chancellor and president Linley Lord told BT.

"The courses offered at each of Curtin's cam-

**"We do understand that there are differences in the business landscapes between Europe and Asia, which is why we adapt our programmes ... A course focusing on Asian politics and economies would not necessarily be available to the students on the France campus."**

Vincenzo Esposito Vinzi, dean and president of France's Essec Business School

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puses are based on industry demands aligned with the university's strengths and expertise," Dr Lord says. "Curtin University also aims to align its course offerings with Singapore's industry transformation maps."

Specialised schools are also leaning heavily into Singapore's reputation as a business-friendly Asian city to build up their course niches.

French business school Insead, which opened its first overseas campus here in 2000, spreads classes across a home base in Fontainebleau, as well as premises in Singapore and Abu Dhabi.

Its master's in business administration (MBA) programme offers certain courses only in Singapore, such as "Strategies for Asia-Pacific" and "China's Capital Markets".

Insead students must pick a "home campus", but can then take classes on another campus at least once, with the MBA programme typically seeing 400 students in Asia and 600 in Europe.

Also, Insead's 18-month Executive Master in Finance is largely taught in Singapore, which hosts five of six modules at a campus in Ayer Rajah. Tuition fees for this course come up to S\$90,500. Insead has said on its website that it picked Singapore as the venue because "it's one of the economic powerhouses of a dynamic and high-growth region" and "one of the top startup hubs and the best fintech hub in the world".

Vincenzo Esposito Vinzi, dean and president of France's Essec Business School, gives a similar rationale for setting up shop here.

He tells BT that the launch of a master's in finance here in 2016 came on the back of Singapore's role as a financial hub "and the consequent need for tailored education for professionals working in this field".

Some specialisations, in topics such as financial technology and Asian business, are only available on the Essec Asia-Pacific campus here.

"We do understand that there are differences in the business landscapes between Europe and Asia, which is why we adapt our programmes," he adds. "A course focusing on Asian politics and economies would not necessarily be available to the

Marina Bay Sands has more than 10,000 staff members, and needs to add 1,000 by year-end as new eateries open. More workers must also come on board as MBS embarks on a S\$4.5 billion expansion that will build a fourth hotel tower with 1,000 new rooms. BT PHOTO: KELVIN CHING



ector of hotels and sector manpower.

Meanwhile, programmes at the Singapore Hotel and Tourism Education Centre (Shatec) – the Singapore Hotel Association's longtime training arm – also closely follow the national skills frameworks, as well as industry road maps, for the hotel and accommodation and food services industries.

Hotel association executive director Margaret Heng, who is also the chief executive of Shatec, told BT that there is growing demand for new skills such as digital marketing and data analytics that offer guests "a high-touch, high-tech experience".

Now, with the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) set to bring its bachelor's in international hospitality management to town, EHL chief oper-

students on the France campus."

**'Fiercely self-reliant'**

What's sauce for the goose works, of course, for the gander as well.

As foreign schools sink roots in Singapore, the non-profit and "fiercely self-reliant" private education provider Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS), founded in 1956, has in turn "brought the Singapore flag overseas", as secretary-general R Theyvendran puts it.

"With operations in Singapore being challenging, it has become important for MDIS to look for alternatives to achieve organic growth," Mr Theyvendran adds, pointing to an MDIS branch in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, that was set up in 2008.

MDIS Tashkent now enrolls more than 3,000 students, who hail from countries such as South Korea, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. A second overseas campus, Kolej MDIS Malaysia, is active in Johor Bahru.

Meanwhile, Dr Vinzi tells BT that, since Essec's Singapore campus opened in 2005, "it has developed its finances significantly and consequently operates independently of any support from the French or Singapore governments".

Swiss school EHL has not applied for funding from Singapore agencies like the Economic Development Board, adds Mr Medina.

Speaking with BT on the Lausanne campus – which is under expansion to 60,600 square metres by 2021 – Mr Medina shrugs off talk of shuttered predecessors or stiff competition.

"There are some hospitality programmes in Singapore... and we will probably try to partner with those entities, if they are open to that," he says.

"The goal is not really to go into competition over there... We have this longtime image of excellence. We will deploy the same thing over there, and finally, the market will decide."

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ating officer and deputy CEO Maxime Medina says the school will uphold its focus on industry tie-ups, such as internships and business case studies.

"Today, we have more than 4,000 partners all over the world for internships, and a certain percentage – I would say maybe 30 per cent or 40 per cent – are in Asia," he tells BT, naming Thailand's Dusit Thani Group.

"Now, maybe what will be important is to develop partnerships that are linked to research and development... That probably will be a challenge, to develop these industry partners more: student business projects, and research and development."

The Swiss university is making one concession for its Singapore campus: It will lift the ban on religious garb in its strictly enforced, 14-page campus dress code. The change was made at the behest of the authorities here, according to EHL dean Inès Blal.

Mr Medina also tells BT that final-year electives could be tweaked at the EHL campus in Singapore – "more leaning to the culture, like doing business in Asia, or real estate development in this region", he suggests.

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