

Internships, career coaching boost private school students' job prospects

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Q My son has to enrol in a private education institution (PEI) to get a degree.

I cannot afford to send him overseas for four years, but I have enough for two years. Is there any value in him spending some semesters in the PEI at the home campus overseas?

What are the education and job prospects for those who obtain their degrees through PEIs here?

A You asked about doing two years overseas. Two years of study in the United States, Britain or Australia is expensive, so make sure you are able to afford it.

You have to also check if your son can transfer midway through his degree course to complete his studies at the home campus overseas.

If the partner university is running the same degree, and it is based on the same standards and examinations, then it makes sense that a student should be able to transfer to the overseas campus.

I have interviewed a few students who did very well in the University of London programmes at the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), and then transferred to the London School of Economics and Political Science for the final one or two years of their degree.

The students gained from the overseas exposure and in being tutored by some of the best academics there.

SIM also offers the University of London International Foundation Programme which, over the years, has attracted people from O-level students to diploma holders.

The programme aims to support students who are keen to pursue their bachelor's degree in top British universities, and those who want to change their specialisation.

SIM has graduates from this programme continuing their studies at the King's College London, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Leeds and University of Manchester, and even studying Law at the University of Bristol.

From July this year, SIM is also of-



A career and internship fair held at SIM HQ Campus in Clementi in 2018. PHOTO: SIM

fering the Monash University Foundation Year programme to bridge the gap for students who wish to pursue their degree studies in Australian universities.

You also asked about education and job outcomes for those who take up degree courses at PEIs.

I have come across many who do well in their courses, going on to attain second-upper and first-class honours. Some of them even win awards and prizes for topping their course.

SIM's University of London programmes are an example. Last year, SIM had 304 of its students graduating with first-class honours, one of the highest success rates globally for the UOL external-degree programme.

A few of the first-class honours graduates went on to pursue post-graduate degrees in top universities overseas including the University of Cambridge.

Job outcomes are important.

Some PEIs do their own employment surveys. So, when you are doing your checks on PEIs, ask for them and check the data they provide.

Their surveys generally do not use the same metrics as the surveys conducted by the local universities, so it is hard to compare the outcomes for PEI graduates with that of their peers from the local universities.

But the Committee for Private Education (CPE), which regulates

the private education sector in Singapore, does release graduate employment surveys including those for fresh graduates from PEIs.

The last survey of 2018/2019 graduates showed PEI graduates lagging behind their peers in job outcomes as well as salaries.

Overall employment rate was 80.7 per cent, compared with 90.6 per cent for local university graduates. The CPE survey also showed that only 50.5 per cent of PEI graduates had secured full-time jobs.

In terms of salaries, PEI graduates in full-time jobs earned a median gross monthly salary of \$2,800 a month, while their peers from public universities earned \$3,600 a month.

The figures were taken from across all PEIs, so it may be more useful to look at the employment survey results for a particular private institution, like SIM, which tries to use the same metrics as those used by local universities.

For 2019/2020 SIM graduates, the overall employment rate was 82.4 per cent, with 57.1 per cent in full-time jobs and 15.6 per cent in part-time jobs, while 9.8 per cent were freelancers.

The median starting gross monthly salary for those in full-time employment was \$2,815.

To understand the difference in salaries, you should consider the fact that PEI graduates may hold degrees in different disciplines.

Also, employers do discriminate against PEI graduates, just as they discriminate against graduates who come from less reputable universities.

However, take heart that once in a job, it is a graduate's performance that matters.

SIM in 2019 released a survey in which it tracked the career progression of its class of 2013, five years on.

Of the 1,133 SIM graduates who responded to the survey, the overall employment rate was 97.4 per cent, and 94 per cent held full-time jobs.

The majority were working for private firms and about one in 10 was in the public sector. Their gross monthly salary on average was \$4,551.

Kaplan and SIM have in recent years launched numerous programmes to boost the job prospects of their students and provided career counselling, career talks and visits to companies.

Kaplan said its students benefit from industry experts through initiatives such as internships, workshops and coaching sessions. It also offers networking opportunities, career fairs, recruitment talks and a job-matching service.

Kaplan also highlighted its industry advisory boards (IABs), which advises the PEI on the latest trends and provide valuable input to ensure its course curricula remain relevant and current, and prepare its students for the real world.

In total, Kaplan has six IABs,

made up of more than 40 senior executives from multinational corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups.

SIM, too, uses its strong industry links to ensure the education its students receive is relevant and up-to-date. It has a career centre that provides a range of services including career profiling for students to gauge their suitability for different careers, as well as career counselling and coaching.

Internships are known to boost job prospects for students, and Kaplan and SIM offer internship programmes in partnership with external companies.

SIM, for instance, has a training and placement programme with Changi Airport Group. It allows students to undertake different roles in a six-month internship with iShopChangi.

SIM also holds two career and internship fairs annually, which typically attract the participation of about 130 employers from a wide range of industries.

The most recent one held last month was scaled down and held virtually due to the pandemic.

More than 45 companies from a wide range of sectors participated, including OCBC Bank, KPMG, Great Eastern, Tata Consulting, NCS, Cognizant, Singapore Police Force and McDonald's. More than 1,600 students attended the fair.

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