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WE SET YOU THINKING

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Internships: A remedy for uncertainty

FROM KWAN JIN YAO

The Structured Internship Programme (SIP) offered by Nanyang Polytechnic (“NYP to offer structured internships to all its students”; May 16) sets a good precedent for the other polytechnics as well as the Institutes of Technical Education.

Simply doing well in academics is no longer adequate and such programmes are already established in the universities, providing undergraduates with opportunities to improve their career prospects.

Programmes such as these are particularly useful for those entering the workforce for the first time, and the orientation activities and work tasks will ease them into organisational processes and hierarchies. What stands out in the SIP is that students “will be matched with industry mentors as they undergo real-world training and embark on projects”.

Through my different attachments with companies, I have been blessed with mentors who are eager to not only



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TODAY FILE PHOTO

share their insights, but also challenge interns to do much more. Such rigour is appreciated, and not necessarily present in the confines of a school.

More importantly in the long run, internships help students ascertain whether they might be suitable for a company or industry. Through months of immersion they get a glimpse at their possible roles and responsibilities, speak to colleagues who have amassed years of experience and expertise, and put into practice the

know-how picked up in the classroom.

Even after three years of tertiary education, the future may remain hazy for some, and my internships during the holidays have been a good remedy to this uncertainty. For instance, working in a bank last year, even if it was for a short while, made me realise I was ill-suited to the finance sector.

Career guidance is crucial in the school and, in this vein, internships provide a link between academic courses and careers. Educators can help to shape perceptions, encouraging students to establish ambitions and aspirations on their own.

The SIP and its equivalent programmes are stepping stones. Ultimately, the onus is on students to make independent decisions. The notion of lifelong learning, which Education Minister Heng Swee Keat alluded to, is applicable too.

Just as undergraduates may have to source for their own internships, they will have to work for their own opportunities in the corporate world if they want to develop as individuals.

More legal aid now, but demand still exceeds supply

FROM LOUIS LAU YI HANG

I refer to the report “Five full-time lawyers help boost legal-aid scheme” (May 19).

One of the most respected criminal lawyers of our time, the late Mr Subhas Anandan, once said that even “the most heinous offenders deserve their day in a court of law”. The foundations of Singapore’s justice system rest upon

the value of equality. No matter what crime has been committed, all accused must be tried fairly and in accordance with the law. This would include them having representation in court, as they may have little to no knowledge of how the legal system functions.

Sadly, it appears that many accused people and even some who are in a way victims themselves (such as those forced into becoming loan shark

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runners) are unable to afford the often-costly legal fees and, hence, go into court unrepresented. They are at risk of being punished unfairly or even wrongly convicted, where the latter could cost them years of their lives. Such potential miscarriages of justice are unacceptable.

It is thus heartening to read that there are lawyers who are willing to step up and help, and that there are also law firms willing to chip in. This goes to show that the spirit of selflessness is very much alive in the legal community. That the Government helps fund the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) also shows the importance of ensuring those accused receive a fair trial with professional legal representation. The widening of the scope of aid under CLAS will also extend legal aid to a wider range of accused people.

However, even with such aid, demand still exceeds supply. As such, I hope the examples set by these five lawyers, some of Singapore’s top private law firms and even the Government will inspire more to contribute to our community and sign up for pro-bono activities or even take up cases under CLAS. Such efforts may not yield much monetary reward, but they will provide an invaluable sense of satisfaction for those willing to lend a helping hand.

Refugee crisis: S’pore taking wise approach

FROM PRISCILLA POH BENG HOON

I support Singapore’s position of not accepting any refugees, especially when the Rohingya migrant crisis is one rooted in domestic issues.

Some have said that if Singapore does nothing, we cannot escape the blame for the refugees’ plight. But one of the fundamental principles of the ASEAN Constitution is the right of each state to exist free of external interference.

Singapore has rendered humanitarian help in terms of manpower, money and relief items when countries were struck by natural calamities, and in search-and-recover operations in incidents such as last year’s AirAsia crash. It also has a regional disaster-relief coordination centre located at the Changi Command and Control Centre to coordinate humanitarian assistance for disaster relief efforts.

But it is foolhardy to ask our Government to set up refugee centres elsewhere to house refugees. This would contribute to the rise of human traffickers, as Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said recently in response to the crisis. Offering help blindly sends wrong signals to criminals and the larger world.

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