



Mr Eric Yong (left), seen here with mentor Lim Weng Siang, worked at Munich Automobiles under the ITE scheme. PHOTO: DON WONG

Fewer taking on ITE traineeships despite success stories

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SINGAPORE – Fascinated with cars since he was a child, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) student Eric Yong, 20, described his automotive technology traineeship as a dream come true.

Attached to automobile company Munich Automobiles, he worked on high-end BMW cars and was sent to Malaysia for training.

Under the ITE traineeship scheme, Mr Yong worked for three days and returned to ITE to study for the rest of the work week for two years — emulating the work-study system pervasive across European countries such as Switzerland and Germany. The Ministry of Education (MOE) visited these countries last month to study their systems.

He said: “You get to have first-hand experience and be hands-on during the traineeship ... school may not always be able to provide such exposure”.

Nevertheless, Mr Yong’s case is an exception rather than the norm in the traineeship scheme, which provides fresh secondary-school leavers with skills training leading to nationally-recognised ITE qualifications.

Employers under the traineeship scheme have flagged high attrition rate as an issue. Although Mr Yong finished his programme last year, three trainees who started alongside him dropped out along the way.

The ITE did not respond by press time on the attrition rate but the institute’s Deputy Chief Executive (Industry) Aw York Bin said the number of students completing their traineeship is “not as (high) as in their full-time (NITEC) study programmes”.

Since the scheme started in 1992, the number of traineeship programmes offered has decreased from 60 to about 40, with some being phased out as industry demand evolved. Student enrolment has also fallen — from 1,000 trainees annually about five to six years ago, to 600 now.

The ITE is currently awaiting the MOE’s recommendations from its review on how to better integrate

academics and practical training in the polytechnics and ITEs.

In the meanwhile, Mr Aw said a challenge lies in convincing parents to let their children take up this option. They prefer to have their children study full-time NITEC programmes and enter higher education rather than starting work at a young age, he said.

Employers feel better monetary incentives could be provided — students currently earn between S\$1,000 and S\$1,400 a month — and that the stan-

ding of skilled jobs should be raised to attract and retain trainees.

“Blue-collar jobs where people need to get their hands dirty do not seem so attractive to youths,” said Munich Automobiles Sales Manager Robert Leal.

Ms Christina Kong, Senior Director (HR and Corporate Affairs) from the JUMBO Group, agreed that more could be done to promote the traineeship scheme as an alternative and for young people to understand the importance of learning skills.

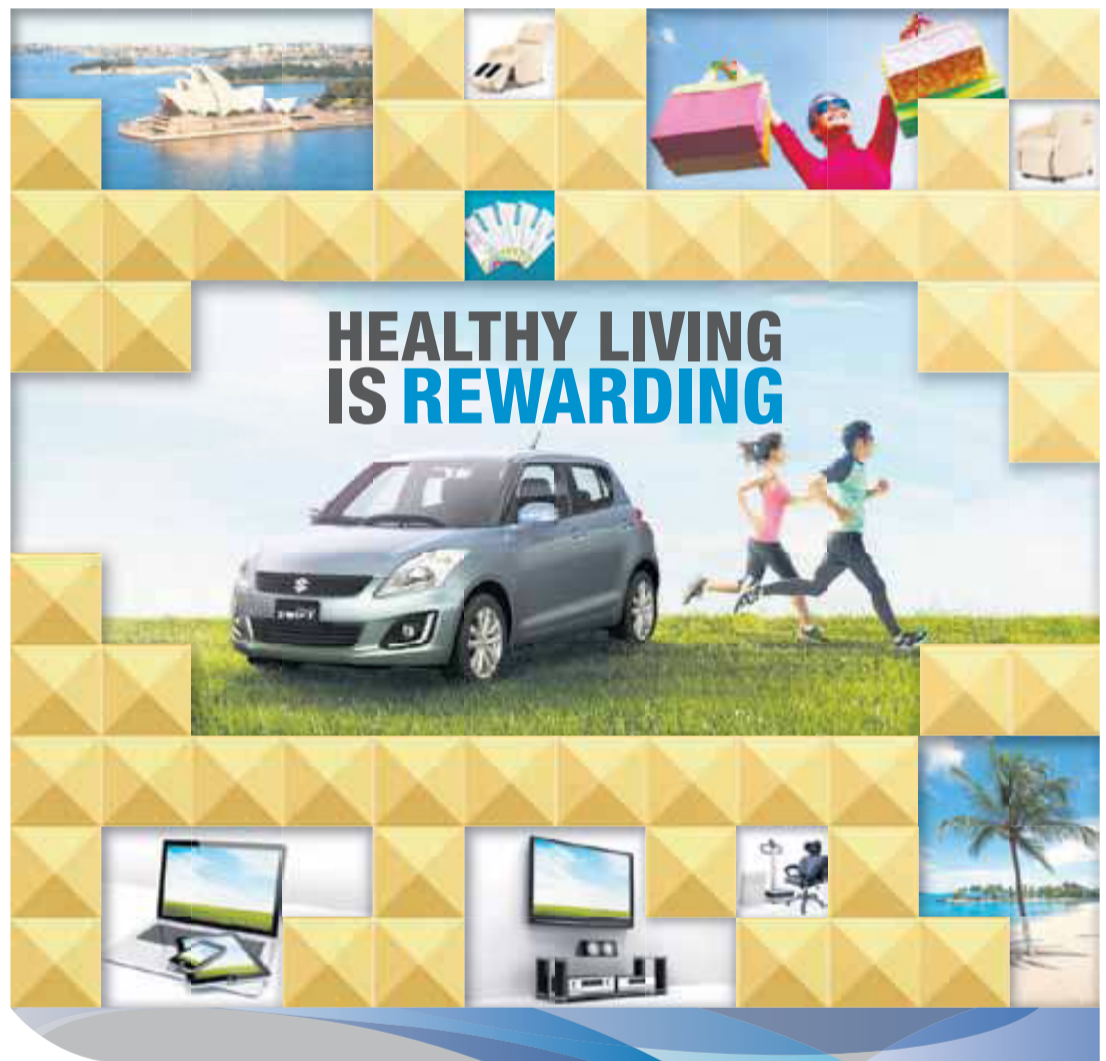
Mr Soetomo Said of Branded Life-

style Enterprises said he had to counsel his retail trainees to stay on. Some face personal challenges or have issues with time management, he noted.

An ITE spokesperson said pupils under the traineeship scheme are typically those who wish to earn an income while studying.

The ITE has since introduced an orientation programme for trainees to prepare them for the work environment and offers career counselling to match traineeship applicants to available courses.

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