

Hands-on approach

The graduate diploma programme at ISS provides practical training with real-world application to give students a competitive edge

Cheryl Tay

ONE of the emerging Information Technology (IT) trends is that of pervasive computing, where people use computers not just at home or in the office, but on the move and throughout the day, points out Dr Robert Firth (right), senior member of the software engineering programme at the Institute of Systems Science (ISS) of the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Another trend of the IT industry is the slow but visible growth of insourcing, he says.

Insourcing, Dr Firth explains, is the pulling back of IT development into the parent company rather than sending it offshore. Bringing the expertise in-house is recommended, as long-term maintenance of the product becomes faster, more responsive and of higher quality.

To help IT professionals move into the field, one of the two programmes that ISS offers is the graduate diploma in systems analysis. The other is Master of Technology (part-time).

The diploma is a conversion programme for graduate IT professionals to take their place in the industry, says Dr Firth. It will equip students with the latest IT knowledge and skills, to help IT graduates to advance their careers in their current field and for non-IT graduates to craft a new career path.

The 13-month full-time programme provides practical training with real-world application. Teaching staff have industrial experience and many of the tools and techniques they teach have been applied in the real world. A five-month industrial attachment is also included in the programme.

"On return from internship, our students are usually excellent candidates for our job placement service, and it is not untypical for more than half of them to have job offers on the day they graduate," says Dr Firth.

The programme has run every year since 1981. Its curriculum is reviewed after every run, with teaching staff identifying new tools or techniques to be

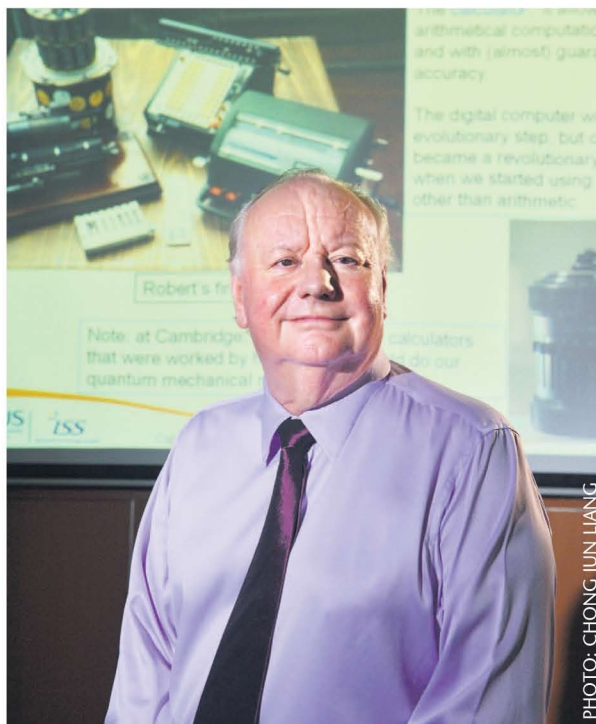


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incorporated in the course.

Latest developments include two specialist tracks — an extended internship and an internship placement system that tries to match the appointments with the students' interests and specialisations.

Another development provides assistance to students with weak English language skills. Every student is tested before admission and there is a coaching track for those who fall below the median.

Professional team builders conduct team-building coaching sessions to help ease students through the early part of the course and prepare them for the team workshops.

Ms Teresa Siah, who completed her diploma in 2011 and is now a software engineer with Nexlabs, says: "As a non-IT personnel seeking a career switch, I have benefited much from the programme and I managed to secure a job even before my graduation. I liked the way the curriculum was crafted where we get a chance to apply what we learned immediately after each lecture via workshops and projects."