

Revamped Shatec runs into snags

Departure of key faculty and curriculum changes among issues that are worrying its students

By TESSA WONG

TWO years after its much-publicised \$70 million revamp, Singapore's oldest hospitality training school Shatec is having problems living up to its promises.

New programmes touted to provide students with a broader education are being downsized, while plans to move to a new and bigger campus in Toa Payoh have been shelved because of a disagreement with the site's landlord.

Its plans to go into joint ventures with the upcoming Singapore Sports Hub and the Singapore Airport Terminal Services (Sats) have also fallen through.

Added to the institution's woes is the departure of key teaching staff.

Among those who have tendered their resignations in recent months are the principal of the hosting programme – the cornerstone of its new curriculum – and the vice-president of its lodging programme.

The problems, coupled with the lack of a new campus, have left students concerned. They cited a curtailed curriculum and changes to the work attachment programme – which has been reduced from one year to six months – as issues which worried them the most.

They also complained that the main campus in Bukit Batok, which has been in use for about a decade, was cramped and rundown.

Shatec was set up in 1983 as the training arm of the Singapore Hotel Association. In 2008, it unveiled a new name – Shatec Institutes – and a new curriculum that would give trainees a more

broad-based education.

Students would no longer learn just basics like setting tables or housekeeping, but also skills like guest communication and etiquette.

Under the revamp, its 1,400 students who can take two- or three-year courses could also choose to be trained as connoisseurs of classical music, wine, art and luxury brands.

They would also have opportunities for more internships and overseas trips.

But sources said that the school now wants to scale back on its fancier new offerings, such as hosting skills, in favour of traditional hospitality skills.

When contacted by The Straits Times yesterday, the chairman of Shatec's board, Mr Albert Teo, said that any changes would reflect the main purpose of the school – which is to serve the hotels and their needs.

"We want to stay focused and not deviate from this objective," he said.

Shatec's chief executive, Mr Anthony Yip, said that while core programmes will remain for current batches, they may be reviewed for future students.

SERVING THE HOTELS

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DOWNSIDED

Curriculum that was to provide students with skills like guest communication and etiquette, as well as opportunities for more internships and overseas trips

SHELVED

Plans to move to bigger campus in Toa Payoh
Plans to go into joint ventures with the upcoming Singapore Sports Hub and the Singapore Airport Terminal Services



Shatec students are worried about a curtailed curriculum and changes to the work attachment programme – which has been reduced from one year to six months. ST FILE PHOTO

On the topic of staff departure, Mr Yip said that Shatec is committed to filling vacant teaching positions "at the soonest available opportunity".

He did not confirm the number of teachers who have left, but said the school has about 60 teachers currently.

It is understood that Shatec had a third more teaching staff as of September last year.

As for the joint venture with Sats, Shatec is no longer pursuing it because of recent laws that allow only activities related to providing education, he said.

He declined to comment on why the joint venture with the Sports Hub had fallen through, citing confidentiality reasons.

Mr Yip, who joined the school in January, is Shatec's third chief executive in the last four years.

His most recent predecessor, Mr Steven Chua, was at the helm for about two years.

According to sources, the reason behind his departure and the recent changes was down to a conflict between the school's board of directors and Mr Chua, who left last September.

It is understood that they disagreed over the new direction the school was taking – one that Mr Chua, a Shatec graduate himself, had been hired to forge.

The Shatec Institutes revamp and new curriculum were put in place to compete with the five polytechnics and the Institute of Technical Education, which in recent years have rolled out hospitality training programmes.

When contacted, Mr Chua would say only that he left because of "strategic differences".

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