Whither higher education?

Earlier this month, the National University of Singapore announced that in place of a three- or four-year programme leading to a degree, it would commit itself to a two-decade relationship with students. Is it time to rethink the role of higher education?

For centuries, universities have operated on the assumption that three or four years of study sufficiently prepare most graduates for a lifetime of employment. The origins of that model lie in medieval Europe, though it became widely adopted by women only less than 100 years ago. Over the course of that past century, the model has been engaged into question whether the degree-based system of higher education remains fit for purpose. The first is that our lives are now much longer. Since 1900, average human life expectancy has more than doubled. Yet our education, work and retirement patterns remain essentially the same. Most of that additional time has gone into our retirement years; that age is pushed back, and our work lives are extended. (Students are in their 50s, and some 60s.)

Simon Chesterman

The Straits Times

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