



At the scheme's launch yesterday were (from left) NuVista Technologies director Vijay Bareja, Magnum Spirits & Wine director Edmund Tsai, Greenpac managing director Susan Chong and UOB-SMU Entrepreneurship Alliance Centre director Ang Ser Keng.

PHOTO: JOSEPH NAIR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

# Jobless? Be an SME adviser

■ BY ELIZABETH WILMOT

SMALL and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) needing expert advice in these trying times – but without the means to obtain it – can now turn to the inaugural Business Advisers Programme (BAP).

The scheme has a second benefit: It offers short-term positions to unemployed workers in various fields.

Launched by the Singapore Management University (SMU) yesterday, the BAP will match unemployed professionals, managers, executives and technicians with SMEs. They will serve as full-time business advisers on short-term stints.

Spring Singapore will fund up to 60 projects, paying 70 per cent of the \$5,000 monthly project fee in each case. The SME will pay the other 30 per cent. There will be one adviser per project, and each SME can have up to two projects.

Associate Professor Annie Koh, dean of executive and professional education at SMU, said: "SMEs that do not have the financial means to engage business advisers can now do so with government funding support, while jobs are created for re-trenched or unemployed professionals, managers, executives and technicians with a wealth of expertise to contribute."

Those who wish to be advisers must have at least five years' relevant working experience and should be available for short-term assignments. SMEs must agree not to displace existing staff by taking on the advisers.

Matching will be done based on the advisers' areas of expertise and the firms' needs. Shortlisted applicants will attend a two-day BAP workshop in May to understand more about SME business culture before their attachments begin.

At the BAP launch yesterday, SME leaders were upbeat about the scheme.

"I feel that this is more like a mentorship. We can look at how to improve our processes from a different view. It's a win-win (situation) for both," said Mr Charles Wong, managing director of shoe-maker Charles & Keith International.

Still, there are some concerns.

"They (would-be advisers) are asking about authority, about time, about pay. These are their expectations when they come to the SME. There will be good and bad experiences," said Mr Edmund Tsai, director of Magnum Spirits & Wine, an alcoholic beverage distributor.

Mr Vijay Bareja, director of NuVista Technologies, an information technology and engineering outsourcing firm, said: "I think the main thing is he or she should be able to adapt to the new culture. Obviously, they should add value to the SMEs."

He added that long-term employment was not out of the question if the "chemistry works well" between the firm and the business adviser.

One aspiring adviser, Mr Khuzema Abbas, 50, who has six years' experience in human resource development, said: "It works out positively for both parties...For me, it can be an addition to the resume, (having) acquired new skills and a new outlook."

For more information and to apply for the scheme, visit [www.smu.edu.sg/centres/usea/business\\_advisors\\_programme.asp](http://www.smu.edu.sg/centres/usea/business_advisors_programme.asp)