JUGGLING part-time study and a full-time job may not be easy — but it pays off, according to a survey.

Nearly six in 10 graduates from UniSIM — Singapore’s only university for working adults — earned more after getting a degree, said a poll it commissioned.

The results come as the Government considers opening up more higher education places and pathways to tertiary qualifications for Singaporeans, including those who missed out the first time and want to make up for it later in life.

A total of 1,036 people were quizzed in the survey. They represented about a third of those who graduated from UniSIM between 2007 and 2009.

The poll found their annual salaries increased by around 21 per cent on average — rising from about $40,000 to $50,000. This translates to about $3,800 a month, if the end-of-year bonus is included. One in five enjoyed a jump in earnings of more than 30 per cent.

Many also found their career choices opened up after they got their degree. A third managed to switch jobs within two years of graduating and 60 per cent moved to an entirely different industry. For those who changed jobs, the salary rose by an average of 27 per cent.

UniSIM has nearly 12,000 working adults on its degree courses, most of whom are aged 25 to 34 and hold polytechnic diplomas.

Its president

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It pays to get a degree: UniSIM survey
Cheong Hee Kiat said he was heartened that studying there had helped its graduates advance their careers and achieve their aspirations. He said the survey results and the fact the Ministry of Education subsidises tuition fees of UniSIM students show it is "on the right track".

Human resources consultants say the average annual salary of $50,000 shows UniSIM graduates are catching up with their peers who went directly to university. Mr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwideConsulting, said a typical 30-year-old degree holder is likely to earn between $3,900 and $4,200 a month. "So despite going to university a few years later, they catch up with their age-group peers who go to the local institutions," he said.

Demand for graduates remains high despite the economic uncertainty, with firms raising their starting salaries, recent surveys have shown. And Mr Leong admitted that candidates from Singapore's main universities are often in greater demand, as they are more mature and have more working experience. But he added some employers prefer UniSIM graduates because they are more mature and have more working experience.

Asked about the 40 per cent who did not enjoy salary increases, Professor Cheong said it was the result of "disparity in performance". "If you have the qualifications but perform poorly, then the employer is likely to keep you in your old position," he said.

He said some students are doing a degree to prepare for a new career later in life or pursue their interests outside work. "There are many who take up our counselling degree because they want to become a counselor in their church or work with a social welfare organization," he said.

UniSIM graduates told The Straits Times they decided to take up degrees to improve their career prospects. Mr Rachel Toh, 28, used to work as a multimedia producer but took a course in visual communications and business as she felt she could advance only so far with a polytechnic diploma. She graduated with a second upper honours and is now Swisshotel’s assistant manager for design.

Mr Lee Xunzhong, 26, moved from the leisure industry to banking after doing a business degree, and now works as a personal banker with CitiBank Singapore. "I appreciated the fact the lecturers had a lot of real-world experience," he said.

Mr Leong said the Government should study the UniSIM survey results to see how those who take alternative routes to attaining a degree fare. "More people aspire towards a degree, but not everyone can or wants to go onto university immediately after a level or foundation programme," he said. "The survey results show that there is a viable route. It meets the aspirations of people and improves their job prospects."

Some grads want to pursue second career