

3 fellowships for female researchers

COSMETICS giant L'Oreal announced yesterday it would hand out three \$20,000 fellowships a year to young female scientists in partnership with a United Nations offshoot and the national science agency A*Star.

The \$20,000 fellowships are meant to help women doing research, said Professor Leo Tan, Singapore's head of science under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

He said that while girls and boys get equal educational opportunities here, cultural perceptions of science as a career can deter women from entering the field.

The L'Oreal-Unesco For Women In Science fellowships have been given out since 1998 in 40 other countries, including South-east Asian nations like Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia.

They will be awarded in Singapore for the first time next year, as only scientists from Unesco member-nations are eligible for the award.

Singapore rejoined Unesco last year after a 21-year absence.

Women researchers, like developmental-biology doctoral student Cecilia Lanny Winata, 26, however, say the sum is not large enough to finance a year of research, though it will help supplement existing grants.

Singapore's research funding is typically generous, with PhD students receiving up to \$36,000 a year and post-doctoral fellows getting up to double that amount.

National University of Singapore Associate Professor Ge Ruowen said, however, there were fewer women than men in the highest levels of science, so the extra encouragement would be "a helping hand for research". Prof Ge sits on the jury that will award the L'Oreal-Unesco fellowships.

The awards will be given to life science researchers next year and those in materials science the following year. They will alternate between the two annually.

Applications open early next year.