

Aid for unis to set up top-notch research centres

3 varsities to get govt funds to exploit their strong areas

By JANE NG

THE three universities here have already achieved academic excellence, so the way forward for them is to become research-intensive institutions, a high-level panel has said.

To nudge them in that direction, the Government will help them set up Research Centres of Excellence in areas where they are strong.

The aim, ultimately, is for these centres to conduct

"world-class investigator-led research with a global impact", said Dr Tony Tan, who chairs the panel.

The International Academic Advisory Panel met this week to map out directions for tertiary education in a Singapore with a knowledge-based economy. It praised the Government's move to provide funding to Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University to start these world-class centres.

This aid will ensure that university funds are not diverted inadvertently from teaching to research.

NTU president Su Guan-ying said the extra resources will be a big help in raising

the standard of research at the university.

He said: "We have a generally high level of research now, but on average, we still can't compare with, say, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"A research centre of excellence would create an area where research is brought to a world-leading level."

He added, however, that it was critical to find a world-class authority in that chosen research area who was willing to relocate to Singapore.

The advisory panel, made up of university leaders and industry experts, said these centres of excellence would enable the universities to do two things - attract and retain top research talent and

also fire the interest of Singaporeans in research.

Getting Singaporeans excited about research is crucial to the country, said one of the panel members, Dr Kari Raivio, who is chancellor of the University of Helsinki in Finland.

He said: "The quickest way of setting up a research centre of excellence is to recruit existing top-level researchers, but we worry about the sustainability of such an approach and commitment of people who are recruited."

It was therefore more viable to motivate young Singaporeans to acquire good training and develop their own research programmes, he added.

Details of the Research Centres of Excellence will be



PHOTO: CAROLINE CHIA

WAY FORWARD: Members of the International Academic Advisory Panel believe that for institutions here to become research-intensive is crucial to Singapore.

announced only in March, but both NTU and NUS separately announced new research ventures yesterday.

NUS will set up the NUS Environmental Research Institute, a multi-disciplinary body that will bring together expertise from its sciences, engineering, social sciences, environment and law faculties.

NTU, on its part, will work with a firm specialising in radio frequency integrated circuits to set up a new research laboratory.

Part of the \$9 million invested by the company, Advanced RFIC, will go towards funding 30 postgraduate scholarships for NTU students.

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