MORE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

INTEGRATED PROGRAMME
Will be expanded to seven more schools to a total of 18. The seven new schools will have both IP and non-IP tracks, which students can switch between. Those who don’t get into the IP after PSLE can do so later.

NORMAL (TECHNICAL) PROGRAMME
Lessons from an enhanced programme being tried out in three secondary schools — with a more practice-oriented curriculum and industrial attachments — will be applied to other NT classes. There will be two more specialised schools for NT students, after the success of Northlight and Assumption Pathway schools in catering to those who failed the PSLE.

POLYTECHNICS
A new “through train” for Normal (Academic) students will allow those who do well at N-levels to do a one-year foundation programme at the polytechnic, instead of sitting for the O-levels. The five existing polys will be expanded/upgraded at a cost of $700 million.

NAFA AND LASALLE
Both will be aided to team up with good overseas institutions to offer degree programmes. To cater to young Singaporeans with talent in arts, design and media — skills which are in strong demand — the Government will aid both institutions to team up with good overseas institutions to offer degree programmes.

IMPERIAL COLLEGE-NTU MEDICAL SCHOOL
A new collaboration with one of Britain’s leading medical schools, to train more doctors for a bigger, ageing population.

TERTIARY ALUMNI
The Government will commit nearly $4 billion over 20 years to build up endowments. The Singapore Universities Trust will be created, and $2 billion set aside to ensure support through economic downturns. The Government will match, 3-to-1, donations to endowments for new projects and 1.5-to-1 for existing universities. Matching grants will apply to alumni networks of polytechnics and ITEs.

Opening pathways, building peaks

SINGAPORE — The hallmark of any good education system is not just “stretch the brilliant ones but also help those less academically inclined, and all those in between”, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

So several new initiatives are being introduced, covering primary to university levels, with a singular focus on creating more educational opportunities and different paths to fulfil potential.

With greater options, it will cement the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) as a major educational hurdle to clear without it being “a do-or-die test that determines the whole future of a child”.

For instance, since Normal (Technical) students often blossom in the Institute of Technical Education, an enhanced NT programme is being tested in Bedok Town, Shauqin and Si Ling secondary schools, with a view to apply the lessons learnt to other NT classes, Mr Lee revealed in his National Day Rally speech.

The pilot curriculum is more practice-oriented, complete with work experience via industrial attachments and internships. So far, this “practical approach” has kept students more engaged and motivated, with lower absentee rates.

The promise from the Prime Minister is that any student who does less well than he had hoped in the PSLE will have chances to catch up and prove himself.

“Our aim should be to provide an education that suits him ... we should not put so much pressure on our kids that would end up being counter productive,” said Mr Lee.

Another addition coming the way of those less academically inclined is two more specialised schools for NT students, following the success of Northlight and Assumption Pathway schools, which cater to the small number of students who do not pass PSLE.

Expansion is also on the cards for the Integrated Programme for express students.

At these 11 schools currently, students can skip the O-levels and go straight to A-levels or the International Baccalaureate, giving them more time to develop their interests and capabilities.

The IP will be extended to seven more schools, which will offer both IP and non-IP tracks, allowing students to switch between them so that those who do not get into IP after PSLE can do so later.

“We have a broad range of options for a broad range of kids,” said Mr Lee.

MORE OPTIONS AT THE POST-SECONDARY LEVEL
Students will have other routes at the post-secondary level.

While the five polytechnics here are already doing well to attract high quality students, the Government will expand the five polytechnics and upgrade the older ones. This is expected to cost $700 million, said Mr Lee.

The Education Ministry will also introduce a “through-train for Normal (Academic) students”. Those who do well at N-levels can opt for a one-year Foundation Programme at the polytechnics instead of doing the O-levels.

Meanwhile, the Government will also support the Lasalle College Of The Arts and Nanyang Academy Of Fine Arts to team up with good overseas institutions to offer degree programmes.

At the varsity level, Mr Lee acknowledged that local universities have been doing a good job. But to excel, the institutions must provide “more options and peaks” within the system, to stretch the outstanding students.

With the plans for the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), which will start in 2012, on track, Mr Lee confirmed the next big step: A third medical school, the Imperial College-Nanyang Technological University Medical School.

This collaboration with one of the leading medical schools in Britain would create more spaces for Singaporeans who want to study medicine and attract good international students, said Mr Lee.

Such new programmes will not come cheap, but the Government will give generous scholarships, bursaries and loans so that promising students can attend “regardless of family circumstances”.

One way the universities can launch new initiatives for students without depending too much on direct government funding could be to build up donations and endowments, Mr Lee suggested.

The Government will help the universities to do more — it will be committing close to $4 billion over 20 years to build up endowments.

It will create a Singapore Universities Trust and will set aside $2 billion in the trust to ensure financial support through economic downturns.

But all schools, not just the universities, should build the culture of alumni taking a strong interest in their alma mater, added Mr Lee.

Many graduates from here have gone on to do well in life and they can now be tapped to raise funds and give expert advice.

WHAT THEY SAY ...

It is good that my son will not be pressured to try to stay in the Normal (Academic) stream to go to polytechnic. He is stressed that he may drop to the Normal (Technical) stream. I’m glad there’s an alternative route for him with this new ‘through-train’ programme.

Siti Nor Shafidah, 39, secretary

Nanyang Polytechnic, along with all other polytechnics, will be expanded/upgraded, MICA