NTU's $100m blueprint for greatness

5-year plan also reveals 5 'peaks of excellence' that will drive the varsity

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THE Nanyang Technological University (NTU) is setting aside up to $100 million from its budget over the next five years as part of a broad plan to transform itself into a "great global" institution.

This money will serve as a "seed funding" that will hopefully pave the way for other external sources of investment in the long run, said the varsity's provost, Bertil Andersson, as he outlined a new strategic blueprint detailing five key areas that NTU wants to excel in by the year 2015.

"Over the next few years, we will spend about $50 million to $100 million. It will help us attract the 'big money' from outside," said the 62-year-old Swede, who is gearing up to take over as president from Su Guaning next July.

At a press conference yesterday, Prof Andersson and Dr Su were part of a six-member team that introduced the five areas -- or "peaks of excellence" -- future health care, the innovation of new media, sustainability, the best of the East and West, and entrepreneurship.

"These five peaks will drive NTU forward. We are already the youngest university ranked among the top 100 in the world," said Prof Andersson of the 55-year-old NTU. "We want to be like a commander university, to always be ahead of the pack."

NTU, which unveiled its five-year strategic plan yesterday, said that it would build on its current strengths and heritage to make its mark globally.

In the area of sustainability, for instance, NTU has already garnered $830 million in research funding alone to date. The university is also located a stone's throw away from the new JTC CleanTech Park, which will be ready in 2012.

And on the entrepreneurship front, NTU wants to serve as a source of research funding and internship opportunities for its students. The campus is currently incubating some 35 start-ups and counting.

"As one of the two largest public universities in Singapore, NTU is like a brain trust for our country," said the 60-year-old Dr Su. "Our responsibility is to train the next generation so they have both the breadth and depth of knowledge to contribute to Singapore's economy and take on leadership positions in future."

Prof Andersson stressed that it was important for the university to "be relevant and useful to Singapore and Singaporeans".

One priority that he has for the next few years is to try and make engineering "cool" again.

"We have to communicate this to the kids. NTU is the world's biggest engineering university, and I would like to think that we are hip and make this a trademark that defines the NTU of tomorrow," he said.

Meanwhile, Prof Andersson is set to go to Vienna next week to receive the prestigious Wilhelm Exner Medal for his work related to artificial leaves and its creation, and his contributions to European and Austrian research.

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The medal has been awarded since 1921 to scientists and inventors whose work has opened up new possibilities in industrial applications.