Nanyang Technological University (NTU) is the latest institution to benefit from a significant donation by a late elderly couple who had previously donated millions of dollars to several causes.
The $4 million gift will help fund NTU’s development of teachers, help introduce scholarships for master’s degrees and grants for trainee teachers at its National Institute of Education (NIE). The scholarships will be named after the couple: Mr Ong Tiong Tat, 74, who passed away in 2013, and Madam Irene Tan Liang Kheng, 73, who passed away in 2016.

The donation, which is being matched by the Government, comes three months after the estate gave $11mn to NTU’s Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine.

At a ceremony at NIE yesterday, Mr Tan Hsuan Heng, the couple’s nephew and the estate’s trustee, said his aunt and uncle had been influenced to give particularly to education and healthcare. “A great teacher can change a student’s life. Teachers need to keep learning and growing,” added the 66-year-old.

The donations came from the $41mn sale proceeds of the couple’s house on a 40,000 sqft plot in King Albert Park.

The latest donation will create an endowment fund that will support students in five master’s degree programmes, including early childhood education, according to the NTU. Up to eight scholarships will be given annually, each ranging between $10,000 and $20,000.

Grants, totalling $290,000 over two years, will go towards supporting teachers in training, and funding, among other things, service learning projects, conference participation and innovations in teaching and learning.

NTU president Subra Suresh, referring to the new endowment, stated: “This generous gift will enable many vital activities that will nurture generations of Singapore’s future teachers and their students.”

Madam Tan’s estate is also contributing $85,000 towards a new showcase of books from the CJ Koh Collection at the NIE Library and Information Services Centre.

Mr Tan told The Straits Times that about 70% of the money has been donated to institutions, schools and organisations—including the National University of Singapore (NUS), the law school at Singapore University of Social Sciences and the nursing school at Nanyang Polytechnic. Students in need in Raffles Institution, Hwa Chong Institution and CHIJ Toa Payoh (Secondary) will also
benefit from the funds. $700,000 was also given to help primary and secondary students of Geylang Methodist School.

The house had been bequeathed to the Ongs by philanthropist KohChoonjoo, a lawyer known as CJ Koh, who had also donated to NUS and NTU. Mr Ong, an investment trader who was close friends with Mr Koh, became his estate's executor and continued his friend's legacy. Like Mr Koh, the Ongs had no children.

Mr Tan said he “chose organisations whose causes I find meaningful and that really need help, while some were specified by my aunt.”