NTU about to embark on a new direction

AS it graduates its largest ever cohort of students, Nanyang Technological University is about to make "some hard choices" about the direction ahead.

NTU president Su Guaning said it has reached a broad consensus that sustainable cities would be a major theme of its education.

The second direction would be to position the university to take advantage of China and India's rise.

"Our deep insight into China gives us a leg up in developing opportunities there. We're also looking at other opportunities in India. In the aftermath of the financial turmoil of 2008, with Asia taking on increasing weight globally, we have a great opportunity to develop ourselves as the knowledge hub on the new silk road of the 21st century," he said.

While NTU had seized opportunities as they arose during its rapid build-up phase, its Board of Trustees and the university's leadership plan to give it a greater — and decisive — focus at an upcoming strategic planning workshop.

"Once the directions are set, we must be resolute and united in moving NTU decisively ahead," said Dr Su.

The calls have been mounting, most recently by Education Minister Ng Eng Hen three days ago, for NTU to distinguish and differentiate itself in certain fields.

And Dr Su said yesterday, on the first day of NTU's six-day convocation period, the university has been working on the issues as the number of its undergraduate applications rose from 20,000 in 2003 to 38,000 this year.

Its undergraduate population has also grown from 15,000 to 21,000 this year, and 8,000 students in total are graduating this month, including the pioneer cohort of students from the School of Art, Design and Media, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences.

While many fresh graduates might wish they were entering the working world at a more upbeat time, yesterday's graduands in art, design and media were especially not lacking in optimism, with the creative industries and interactive digital media now strategic areas for Singapore.

"(My parents) were a bit apprehensive; they were a bit worried because in a country that is driven by empirical evidence and statistics, this (Fine Arts course) is something not tried or tested, there is always a fear of failing ... but today they are very proud of me," said Loo Zihan, who is graduating with a Bachelor of Digital Filmmaking and will pursue a Masters in fine arts in Chicago.