Raising the bar at NTU is just the start for Swede

Prof Andersson was lured with improving faculty and research standards when he took on the position of provost at Nanyang Technological University four years ago. The school has since managed to recruit professors from top universities around the world and increase research funding and the number of patents granted. He is set to raise the bar for the university this year.

Next president plans to remake image of the school and woo more top students

JANNE HIG

F OUR years ago, the new provost of Nanyang Technological University (NTU) incurred the wrath of many when he changed the university's tenure system, making it more difficult for lecturers to be promoted.

Groups of unhappy lecturers began to circulate stories about what they felt was a "no promotion" system. But Professor Bertil Andersson, fresh from the newly created post, defended the integrity of the new process, saying it involved internal and external referees assessing lecturers on their research, teaching and service to the community.

The Academic Research Council, set up by the Ministry of Education to oversee national research and development efforts, also said that NTU's new tenure system was comparable to international standards.

Four years on, with the bar raised, NTU is a much higher ship, and the current contract which guarantees a place on the teaching staff till retirement at the age of 65 is much harder to come by. "We've raised the bar to international standards. It has changed the image of NTU, that we are not just an institute of international standards," said Prof Andersson, 62, who will take over as NTU president next year.

"We have been able to attract top professors and it has been easy to convince them to come," he said.

One of them is a tenured professor who has been with the California Institute of Technology since 1986, American earthquake geologisterry Seth. In 2008, Professor Seth left Caltech to become the director of NTU's Earth Observatory of Singapore.

Other renowned figures who have joined him at the observatory include a leading volcanologist, Professor Christopher NEal, and neuroscientist expert Paul Tap- pagor. They are among some 30 "superstar" professors whom NTU has managed to attract from top universities around the world.

Others include Professor Niall Taglioni, who has pioneered research into virtual humans for the last 30 years, and Visiting Professor Randolph Marcus, Nobel Prize winner for chemistry.

The other task Prof Andersson was asked to carry out was to improve research at NTU.

In five years, the university has increased the number of research staff from 700 to 1,600, and citation for each publication has gone up from 1.98 to 4.24.

There were 33 patents granted this year, compared with 14 in 2008.

More significantly, NTU has managed to obtain an increase in research funding from $57.6 million to $187 million.

Prof Andersson attributes the phenomenal success to the partnership of the creation of the National University of Singapore (NUS), which made available more funds for universities to tap on. The foundation

PROF ANDERSSON ON...

The challenge of starting a medical school

"I am not so careful, I cannot produce all doctors. If you educate someone that is not of the highest quality in physics or maths, that's not a big deal. But if you don't educate the best doctor, that's a disaster.

Inter-disciplinary research

"All new discoveries are happening in the interface between different disciplines. I am a believer of meeting places. If a physics student talks only to his classmates, then it would be a boring place.

Shedding old image

"We have been perceived as too square, too Chinese, too far, and having not much research. That is the old NTU. We are improving and will continue to improve. We would like more top students to choose NTU rather than go to the National University of Singapore or abroad."