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NTU chairman Koh Boon Hwee to step down after 28 years



Mr Koh Boon Hwee will be succeeded by National Arts Council chairman Goh Swee Chen. PHOTO: NTU



Goh Yan Han

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SINGAPORE - Mr Koh Boon Hwee, chairman of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) board of trustees, will be stepping down on March 31, said the university on Tuesday (Feb 9).

Mr Koh, who held the post for 28 years - longer than any other university chairman here - will be succeeded by National Arts Council chairman Goh Swee Chen.

Ms Goh is also chairman of the Institute of HR Professionals and Global Compact Network Singapore.

Mr Koh oversaw various changes and milestones at NTU over his long tenure as chairman, including the establishment of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine in 2013 and the university's ascension in international university rankings.

Since 2015, NTU has been ranked between 11th and 13th in the QS World University Rankings, a leap from the 74th place it occupied on the same list in 2010.

He also made efforts to grow the university's philanthropy support, and personally gifted \$2.5 million to NTU in 2010.

The government matched the sum dollar-for-dollar and the money was used to establish a \$5 million endowment fund in support of the University Scholars Award, which NTU later renamed as the Koh Boon Hwee Scholars Award in recognition of his generosity.

Before Mr Koh took on the role of NTU chairman, he had made waves in the private sector as chairman of Singtel, Singapore Airlines and DBS Bank.

A prominent businessman and veteran technology investor, he is currently also chairman of Altara Partners, Rippledot Capital, Sunningdale Tech and Agilent Technologies, among others.

When Mr Koh first took on the role as chairman in 1993, NTU had only six schools - three for engineering and one each for business, applied science and communication - and the National Institute of Education.

Today, the university has 15 schools in five academic colleges, more than 50 research centres, five autonomous institutes and three campuses in Jurong, Novena and one-north.

Mr Koh also supported NTU in its shift towards being more research intensive, digitalising its lessons, as well as creating more efficient and advanced administration systems.

"The work is not yet complete but having started on the greater adoption of digital technologies years before, it facilitated the university's move quickly into online learning, e-exams, virtual meetings and virtual events, and kept the NTU community safe during the Covid-19 pandemic," Mr Koh said.

Education Minister Lawrence Wong thanked Mr Koh for his many years of dedicated service to NTU.

He said: "As the longest-serving university chairman for almost three decades, Boon Hwee's contributions to NTU and the university landscape have been immense.

"He has steered NTU through major milestones such as its formation in the 1990s and its transition to become an autonomous university in 2006. Under his visionary leadership, NTU has grown into a world-class institution with high standards in education."

He added that Mr Koh had guided NTU in expanding the scope of its Continuing Education and Training programmes in support of the lifelong learning movement, to better prepare Singaporeans for the future.



Mr Koh Boon Hwee with recipients of the Koh Boon Hwee Scholars Award. PHOTO: NTU

Mr Koh's successor Ms Goh said that she was honoured to be taking on the role from him.

"He has done an extraordinary job in stewardship and steering the development of the NTU in the last three decades, alongside the trustees and the various NTU leadership teams," she said.

Ms Goh joined the NTU board of trustees in August 2019 and currently also sits on the boards of CapitaLand, Singapore Airlines, SP Group and Woodside Energy Ltd (Australia).

She was formerly the chairman of Shell Companies in Singapore, and retired from the role in January 2019.

NTU president Subra Suresh said that the university was excited to welcome Ms Goh to her new role, with her extensive global experience in diverse fields spanning the business and social sectors.

He said: "Boon Hwee has been at the heart of NTU's phenomenal progress through the years. We will miss his visionary leadership, sharp strategic insights and wise counsel. However, I am confident that we will continue to benefit from his passionate engagement with NTU in other ways for many more years to come.

"We look forward to (Ms Goh's) leadership as we strive to strengthen NTU's rapidly growing status as a leading university in the world to further expand its impact in Singapore, the region and around the globe."

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