

# NTU honours former chairman Koh Boon Hwee

Ng Wei Kai

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) paid tribute to its longest-serving chairman Koh Boon Hwee yesterday evening, against a backdrop of sharks, manta rays and other fish.

The event, held at Ocean Restaurant in Sentosa which has a glass wall facing an aquarium, was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat.

Mr Heng, who was Minister for Education from 2011 to 2015, said: "The standard of education and research in NTU has reached new heights, and NTU is now one of the most highly regarded universities."

Addressing Mr Koh, he added: "You have done so well that all education ministers have refused to let you go. So you had to serve 28 years – an amazing record."

Mr Koh, who held the post for longer than any other university chairman in Singapore, stepped down in March.

During his long tenure, he oversaw various milestones at NTU, including the establishment of the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine in 2013 and the university's rise in international 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.

Mr Koh spoke about his firm belief in education as a route towards social mobility and creating social equality.

Reflecting on his long leadership, he said the Government's decision in 2005 to allow Singapore universities to become autonomous enabled NTU and the board to "control the levers" to achieve its goals.

He said: "I'd like to think, on reflection, that we used the tools that we were given well."

Mr Koh added that it was his ambition as a young man to become a university professor, and while that dream never panned out, he said: "I firmly believe that NTU will one day produce a Nobel Prize winner."

Also at the event were former members of NTU's board of trustees, including former MP Inderjit Singh and Mrs Lee Suet Fern.

Mr Heng also presented Mr Koh with a book marking his service, titled *The Visionary Chairman: How Koh Boon Hwee Steered NTU From Fledging To Fast-Rising*.

Mr Koh, who joined the NTU council in 1991, also oversaw efforts to grow the university's philanthropy support, and personally donated \$2.5 million to the university in 2010.

He was succeeded by National Arts Council chairman Goh Swee Chen, who took over in April.

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DPM Heng Swee Keat (left) presenting Mr Koh Boon Hwee, who was Nanyang Technological University's chairman for 28 years, with a book marking his service. PHOTO: NTU