

NUS gears up to take on the world

SINGAPORE – The financial crisis has hastened the move to a multi-centric world with a growing focus on Asia – and the National University of Singapore (NUS) is shifting gear in tandem, with an eye to becoming the region's pre-eminent knowledge centre.

Putting his stamp 10 months after taking up the varsity president's mantle, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, in his first State of the University Address on Friday, announced that for a start, five research clusters are being set up to encourage integrative research on issues relevant to Asia, such as sustainable urbanisation and ageing.

To boost NUS' standing as a global university, research centres based in China and India are also being set up.

In Singapore, the research clusters will gather "quite a number" of researchers from different fields at NUS, which is looking for funding of between \$5 and \$10 million for the programme. For instance, the Finance and Risk Management cluster brings together researchers from the Risk Management Institute and the Institute for Real Estate Studies.

Other clusters formed this year include biomedical science and translational clinical research, ageing and Asia Studies. The last cluster that does research on environment sustainability will be ready by early next year.

Regular symposiums will be held for researchers in the five clusters, to enable them to share knowledge and interact. And the NUS Global-Asia Institute, which was set up in September under the Asia Studies cluster, will be launching an initial \$1 million grant call next month to get NUS researchers to submit proposals.

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For instance, NUS made a supplementary budget allocation to a number of key academic programmes like design and environment.

It has also introduced a Grooming Excellent Managers programme to provide promising executive staff with development opportunities, such as training attachments in top universities overseas.

On news that the coming Singapore University of Technology and Design will be aiming to grab the top minds in the region and country when it opens in 2011, Professor Tan was unfazed.

He said: "We have a much larger range of disciplines, so that students who come here, if you do design you can also work in the social sciences, take modules in many other disciplines.

"This would be valuable ... particularly as many challenges, going forward, will be more complicated and you will need a broader-based understanding of more disciplines."