

# Tertiary system's next chapter

Institutions should now transition to convergence, says advisory panel

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THE development of Singapore's tertiary education system "has reached a watershed"; and as it now transitions to an "increasingly variegated" landscape, it is imperative that both new and existing institutions "exploit areas of convergence", a high-level panel said yesterday.

At a media briefing to conclude the twice-yearly meeting of the Education Ministry's International Academic Advisory Panel (IAAP), its chairman Tony Tan said that the IAAP considers Singapore to have moved beyond "playing catch-up" to become innovative and "ahead of the

curve". Panel members, many of whom lead top universities worldwide, were particularly impressed with the new institutions and programmes which they think could create in time a "truly distinctive education system, with applications worldwide" and help boost Singapore's economic growth too.

The Singapore Institute of Technology was singled out by panel members – which included prominent Stanford economist Paul Romer and Indian Institute

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of Technology Kanpur director Sanjay Dhande – as key in adding to the flexibility of tertiary education options in Singapore, including the ability to alternate between education and work, redirect career paths, and transition from the polytechnics to a degree.

New additions – Singapore University of Technology and Design and the Imperial College London-NTU medical school – and NUS and Yale University's liberal arts college proposal, were

characterised as "remarkable", as was progress made in the three autonomous universities in retaining student-centred teaching while improving research standards.

Praise aside, one area to note, the IAAP said, was in ensuring sustained resourcing. It voiced support for the \$2 billion Singapore Universities Trust to provide enhanced government matching grants to donations that the autonomous universities receive. Noting that over-reliance on endowment income is risky, given the cyclical and volatile nature of returns from investments, the IAAP said that the diversification of university funding sources is "a move in the right direction".