Universities need to distinguish themselves from each other

SINGAPORE — The Republic’s universities need to distinguish themselves from one another, a high-level education committee said on Friday. One way would be to pioneer education models — the way the new universities are doing, said the panel.

The Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), for one, is paving a new road by offering diploma-holders degree programmes in areas supporting Singapore’s development plans.

Dr Tony Tan, who chairs the 8th International Academic Advisory Panel, said: “SIT will provide another option for polytechnic graduates who choose to obtain their university degrees and will produce highly-desired graduates for Singapore’s growth sectors.”

SIT can hold useful lessons for other countries as they upgrade the knowledge and skills of their workforce, said Dr Tan.

Another pioneering institution is the country’s first liberal arts college — a collaboration between top American university Yale and the National University of Singapore.

Despite fears that academic freedom may be wanting in Singapore, discussions between the two institutions are said to be on track.

NUS vice-president (university and global relations) Lily Kong said the college would “uphold principles of academic freedom”.

Said Professor Kong: “Faculty and students will be free to conduct research and scholarship and publish and teach in the classroom.”

While lauding the initiatives to develop higher learning, the advisory panel cautioned the universities from being too reliant on government grants. They should look towards diversifying funding sources, it added.

The panel also stressed the importance of collaboration between the universities — both the existing and upcoming ones, even as each institution seeks to differentiate itself from the other. This will strengthen Singapore’s position as an innovation hub, the panel said.

DYLAN LOH