THE Singapore government “stands firmly behind” the new Yale-NUS College, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said yesterday.

While there may understandably be complications at the start, given how Singapore’s social and political context differs from America’s, Mr Lee said he believes Singapore to be a unique society in Asia, within which a liberal arts college “can blossom and grow”.

Speaking at the official launch of the Yale-NUS College, Mr Lee said that the distinctiveness of a liberal arts education, and its goal of developing students who can think broadly, rigorously, and make connections across different domains of knowledge, “will be valuable for Singapore in a more complex and inter-connected world”.

He said the presence of industry leaders at the launch demonstrates also that corporations value liberal arts graduates. The College said yesterday that it has secured partnerships with multinational corporations such as Santander Bank and Total Oil, as well as Singapore’s Public Service Division, to offer internships to its future students. Mr Lee said that while the government will do its part to help fund the college, he also hopes that the community will support the new venture through philanthropic gifts.

The Yale-NUS College, he said, hopes to build up a sizeable endowment to attain a more stable financial footing, necessary to recruit top faculty and ensure that deserving students can receive financial aid and not be denied a place.

While university fees have not been finalised, the leadership at NUS and Yale told reporters at a press conference yesterday that these are expected to be “reasonable and affordable” for the quality of education offered.

Similarly, the budget being drawn up for the Yale-NUS College was not disclosed, though this will be “competitive and sufficient” to attract the right faculty, as well as develop a programme that would attract students.

The Yale-NUS College campus, which will adapt Yale’s residential college model in New Haven to Singapore’s environment, will be located next to the upcoming University Town and is jointly designed by US architects KieranTimberlake and Pfeiffer Partners, and Forum Architects in Singapore.