

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

A 'Global Innovation Alliance' to spark new ideas

This body can link educational institutions with businesses and overseas innovation hubs. **BY CHUANG PECK MING**

UNIVERSITIES and polytechnics here, already hotbeds for startups and innovations, can become bigger catalysts for new innovation activity, says the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE). The panel's report envisions the universities and polytechnics, together with companies, hooking up with overseas partners in major innovation hubs and in key demand markets (as opposed to supply markets) to set up what it calls a Global Innovation Alliance (GIA).

The report says that through the GIA, Singapore can "build deep connections to global innovation and technology networks so as to harness new ideas better". "By drawing international connections and bringing together a wide range of perspectives and experiences, we can spark new in-

novation activity." The report also says that "the practice of connecting and working with global partners across geographical and cultural boundaries also inculcates mindsets and instincts that are more alert and ready to tap into opportunities everywhere".

It foresees the GIA expanding existing efforts to boost Singapore's links with regional countries and embracing more universities and polytechnics.

The GIA will open its door to "in-market" partners who provide innovation launchpads to Singaporeans and startups and tap the expertise in the universities and polytechnics and their partners.

The report says the GIA should further serve as "welcome centres" for Singapore-based enterprises and institutions to collaborate with partners on innovation

and technology projects. The idea builds on existing tie-ups.

The Overseas Colleges programme now being run by the National University of Singapore (NUS), for instance, exposes students to innovation and entrepreneurship in places such as Silicon Valley in the US, Tel Aviv in Israel and Beijing in China, and has groomed fresh entrepreneurial talent and promising startups in Singapore.

Observers suggest that the programme be expanded in NUS and other institutes of higher learning. They say the GIA has not only the scope for growth in Singapore, it also has a strong base to build on.

In NUS, ranked the world's fourth most international university recently, about eight in 10 undergraduates get to study abroad; this includes going on semester-long exchanges with students

from 300 universities in 40 countries. NUS also has tie-ups with overseas universities to offer 70 joint, double and concurrent degree programmes.

Phil Batu, the editor of the UK-based Times Higher Education World University Rankings, which puts together the widely recognised international rankings, says NUS stands as the flagship of a true global knowledge hub. "NUS, and indeed Singapore more widely, has become a powerful magnet for international talent – drawing in leading thinkers and scholars from right across the world, and forming the base for exciting and dynamic global partnerships," he says. The GIA has been conceived as a vehicle to give that a further boost.

peckming@sph.com.sg
@PeckmingBT