

PREPARING GRADUATES FOR FUTURE

The world is changing very quickly in terms of jobs... in part because of new technology and knowledge. Universities and higher education will need to respond appropriately to produce future-ready graduates.



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE PRESIDENT TAN ENG CHYE, on adapting to the changing demands of the workforce by offering graduates and alumni a space for lifelong learning.

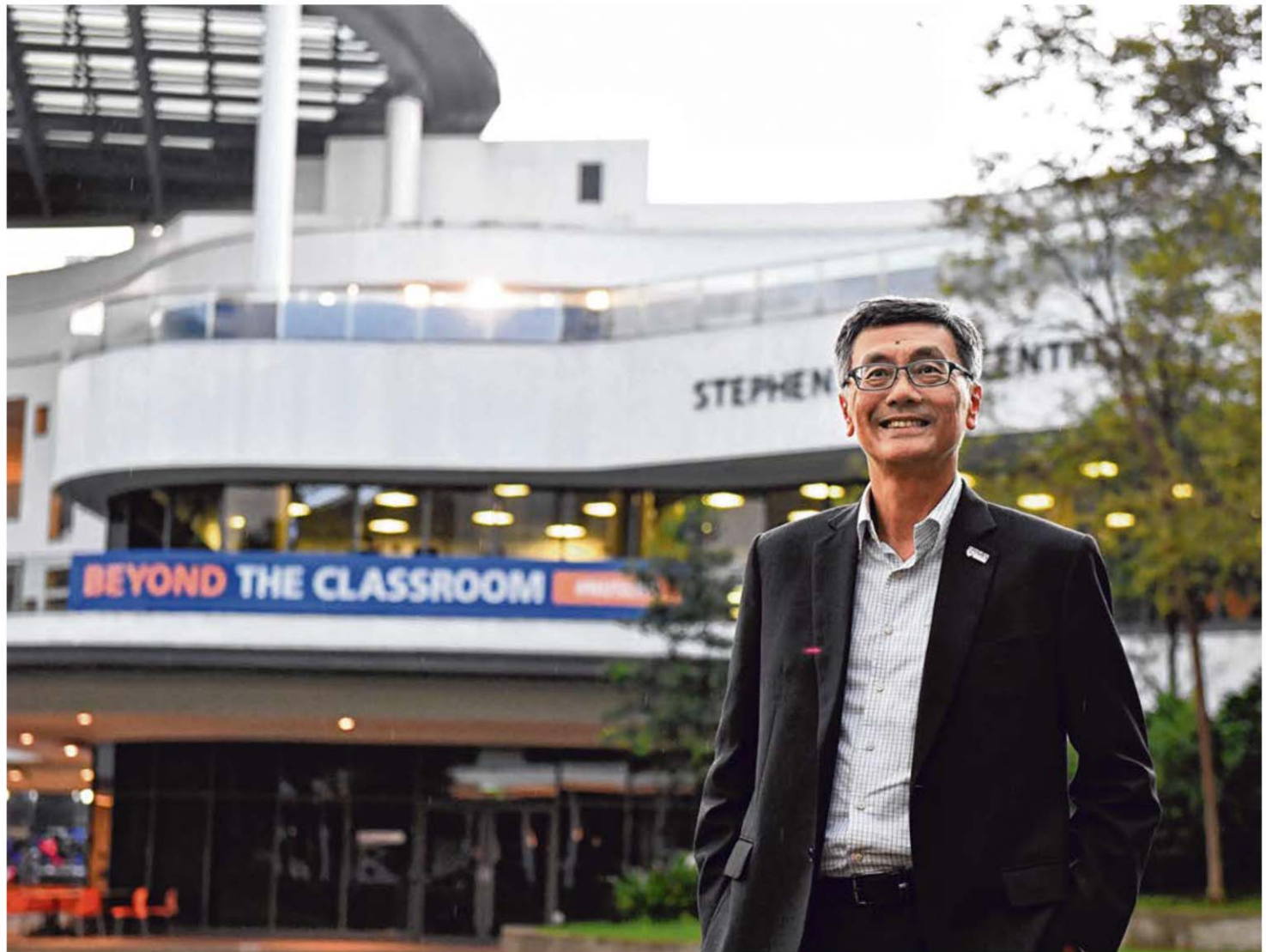
WHAT NUS OFFERS

4,800

Undergraduate modules.

167

Undergraduate and postgraduate modules for alumni to take for free.



The National University of Singapore is considering expanding the proportion of adult learners to more than half of its modules, said its president Tan Eng Chye, who officially took on the top position last month. The university is now experimenting with having more than 10 per cent of adult learners in each class. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

NUS to nurture graduates who are students for life

It aims to weave lifelong learning into higher education to prepare alumni for future jobs

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

After spending three to four years studying for a degree, most people head out to work – and much of what they have learnt in university is forgotten.

But this concept of being a student needs to change because of changing workforce demands, said National University of Singapore (NUS) president Tan Eng Chye. “We are proposing that our graduates will be students for life,” he said.

The aim is for NUS to be an “anchor” for its community of graduates – nearly 300,000 of them – so that they can return to it throughout their lives for continual learning, he said.

The university is now experimenting with having more than 10 per cent of adult learners in each class, he said. “But what if we increase to 20 per cent, to 30 per cent, what’s going to happen?”

The intention is to grow these figures, Prof Tan said in an interview with *The Straits Times* last month.

In fact, the university is considering expanding the proportion of adult learners to more than half of its modules, said the 55-year-old, who officially took on the top position last month.

Each year, the university offers about 4,800 undergraduate modules. It now offers 167 undergraduate and postgraduate modules for alumni to take for free.

“That would have a tremendous impact on the whole campus,” he said, adding that this concept of mixing adult learners with under-

graduates is “revolutionary”.

While it would be easier to teach the two groups separately, there are benefits to getting them to interact. “Adult learners bring with them experience and maturity, and the adult learners can get a lot of enthusiasm and energy from younger undergraduates.”

An initiative that NUS introduced last August to allow alumni to attend its classes for free has proven to be popular, receiving more than 8,000 applications for 404 places in 79 modules. In January, its second run, it took in 1,200 students across 88 modules.

Since Prof Tan, who was NUS provost for the past 10 years, became president, he has met students, staff and alumni, listening to them and sharing his thoughts, over the course of 30 sessions.

One of his aims, he said, is for NUS to weave lifelong learning into higher education, so that graduates and the wider community will

The aim is for NUS to be an “anchor” for its community of graduates – nearly 300,000 of them – so that they can return to it throughout their lives for continual learning.

be better equipped for future jobs.

Prof Tan, a mathematician, added: “The world is changing very quickly in terms of jobs... in part because of new technology and knowledge. Universities and higher education will need to respond appropriately to produce future-ready graduates.”

Another plan he has is to build on the university’s efforts in innovation and grow its networks in the region. More than 300 students now head overseas every year as part of the NUS Overseas College programme which aims to groom entrepreneurs in different business nodes of the world.

The initiative started in 2002 in Silicon Valley and now has nine locations around the world, including New York in the US, China’s Beijing, Switzerland and Germany.

Prof Tan said NUS will now also turn its attention to opportunities in the region: “While we remain global, how can we deepen our focus in South-east Asia?”

Tapping on a region with 625 million people would allow access to talent, funds, ideas and markets, he pointed out.

Last year, in partnership with Indonesian conglomerate Salim Group, NUS Enterprise – the university’s entrepreneurial arm – set up Block 71 Jakarta, an incubation space for start-ups.

Over the next five years, NUS will build new start-up nodes globally, including in cities across South-east Asia, such as Jakarta.

The hope is also to produce a group of NUS students who are South-east Asia-savvy. “You need to know their language... you need to understand a little bit of the social, economic and political environments in each of these places.”

ateng@sph.com.sg