

Others can learn from SIT model, says panel

■ BY JANE NG

THE Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), which provides polytechnic graduates with one more route to a university degree, can be a model other countries can replicate, said a high-powered panel of academics advising the Government on tertiary education here.

The International Academic Advisory Panel (IAAP) praised the institute for preserving the strong foundations of Singapore's polytechnic system while building on Singapore's university landscape.

The SIT, set up last year to provide niche degree courses through tie-ups with reputable overseas institutions, distinguishes itself from other tertiary institutions in one way: It also welcomes polytechnic diploma holders who have started working but wish to earn their degree.

This injects an element of flexibility into the education system, said Professor Paul Romer, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Institute for Economic Policy Research and a member of IAAP.

He said: "Part of what SIT does is introduce that alternation between full-time work and full-time study that hasn't been present here in the system. It's a very important opening up of the flexibility of the education system."

He added that SIT also gives students the option of changing careers by pursuing a course in a field different from their diploma.

"It gives people the courage to take more risks and that, with the alternation between work and learning, is very important in the evolution of the education system here," he said.

The IAAP was set up in 1997 by the Education Ministry to advise Singapore's universities on major trends in university education. Its scope has since been broadened to include providing guidance on the tertiary sector.

Yesterday, the panel also cited the other pioneering education models here which impressed them:

■ Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD): Its inter-disciplinary



Dr Tony Tan, chairman of the IAAP, speaking at the press conference yesterday. The high-level panel advises Singapore universities on major trends in university education. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL HE

learning model incorporating design and other fields is a world first, the panel noted. SUTD's ability to innovate from a clean slate will be instrumental to its success.

■ Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) new medical school: The panel noted that NTU's tie-up with Imperial College London will infuse engineering elements into medical education and help meet the growing demand for doctors here.

The panel suggested the medical

school work closely with existing medical schools and hospitals to optimise the use of clinical training facilities.

■ Progress of the three universities: The panel noted that since its last meeting in 2008, the National University of Singapore, NTU and the Singapore Management University have made remarkable progress in becoming research-intensive universities, without neglecting their key mission of providing a strong foundation in undergraduate education by being centred on the student.

Panel members

- **Mr Dirk Jan van den Berg**, president, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands
- **Professor Sanjay Dhande**, director, Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
- **Professor Mark Wrighton**, chancellor, Washington University in St Louis.
- **Dr Tony Tan**, chairman, National Research Foundation and Singapore Press Holdings
- **Mr G. Leonard Baker Jr**, managing director, Sutter Hill Ventures
- **Dr Robert A. Brown**, president, Boston University
- **Professor Gu Binglin**, president, Tsinghua University
- **Dr Hiroshi Komiyama**, former president, University of Tokyo
- **Dr Kari Olavi Raivio**, former chancellor, University of Helsinki
- **Professor Rafael Reif**, provost, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- **Professor Alison Richard**, former vice-chancellor, Cambridge University
- **Professor Paul Romer**, senior fellow, Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, Stanford University
- **Dr Henry T. Yang**, chancellor, University of California, Santa Barbara