

## HIGHER EDUCATION

# Polys 'will not become pre-universities'

*Polytechnics must retain primary mission of preparing students for the workplace, says Lawrence Wong*

NG JING YNG AND AMANDA LEE  
jingyng@mediacorp.com.sg

**SINGAPORE**—Even as the Republic embarks on a new applied degree pathway in its university landscape — one that could mean the admission of more poly graduates into university — the polytechnics here must retain their “primary mission” of preparing students for the workplace.

This was a point made by an International Academic Advisory Panel (IAAP), which had convened here over the past two days to discuss trends in the higher education sector.

The IAAP also supported the preliminary recommendations from Mr Wong’s committee to develop a future university education pathway which has a strong applied focus.

According to Minister of State (Education and Defence) Lawrence Wong, who is leading a committee looking at future university pathways, the IAAP

also stressed the value of polytechnics here, as university pathways grow.

He said: “As we expand university places, there will be more polytechnic graduates pursuing degree education and we do not want the polytechnics to become pre-universities ... There is still a significant number of poly students who will go directly to work and that remains the primary mission of our polytechnics.”

Apart from ensuring diploma education remains relevant, there is a need to look at ways to provide poly graduates with an opportunity to pursue higher education later in life, said Mr Wong.

Since last year, Mr Wong and his committee have been visiting several countries to study their universities models and he has spoken on the benefits of a university with a strong element of work built into the curriculum.

Reiterating that Singapore cannot simply import overseas models, he cited universities such as Drexel University in Philadelphia, the United States, where students can opt for the four-year degree course with a minimum six months of work, or the five-year degree course, which requires up to 18 months of work.

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**Mr Lawrence Wong**  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE AND EDUCATION

He had also floated the possibility of leveraging the existing Singapore Institute of Technology, which already carries some elements of an applied model.

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who chaired the IAAP, said: “We want to do something that is a new model...not just a replica of what already exists in Singapore, not just dressing something up so that it looks like a degree but a new model of excellence for future economy and society.”

Among other things, it also suggested that the Government develop a framework to track how graduates do after they leave university, in order for the public to make informed decisions.

Over the next few months, Mr Wong’s committee will deliberate further on the new university pathway. It will submit its full report by the end of the year.

## STILL SOME CATCHING UP TO DO IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH

● As the Republic builds its niche in the sciences, there is now some “catch up to do” in the area of social science and humanities research, said Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam yesterday.

Mr Tharman noted that universities here have already started work on this, but it could be taken to a “much higher level” through ways such as attracting talent and encouraging teaching and research in the social sciences and humanities.

“Research funding is one way of incentivising talent development but it is also useful in its own right ... there is a lot of untapped potential in social science research in Singapore with lessons that can be derived for public policy in Singapore and elsewhere,” he said.

He stressed, however, that there may still be some bias, mainly by giving priority to “needs driven or use-inspired research” in areas such as housing or transport.

Moving forward, the Government will review suggestions put forth by the panel.

These include the establishment of a research council and placing its research focus in topics like Asian societies and the management of multi-ethnic social compacts. **NG JING YNG**