SINGAPORE: An international academic advisory panel is meeting in Singapore to chart a new strategic direction for Singapore's tertiary sector.

The meeting is being chaired by the Chairman of the National Research Foundation Dr Tony Tan.

Much has been achieved in the last 25 years in the tertiary education sector in Singapore, said Dr Tan.

Singapore's three universities enjoy high international standing and graduates contribute significantly to the growth and development of the Singapore economy.

Dr Tan told the international academic advisory panel members, who come from renowned universities worldwide, that Singapore's university sector has reached a creditable stage.

And it was timely to chart out what should be the new strategic direction for the tertiary sector in response to the needs of society and the economy.

Dr Tan said: "Countries worldwide are developing knowledge-intensive industries to achieve economic competitiveness and growth. For Singapore, this means a stronger emphasis on R and D and innovation to sustain our competitive advantage over the longer term."

Another issue to be deliberated by the international academic advisory panel is how to increase the rate of university participation in Singapore.

This means increasing the number of students achieving a university education and encouraging more of them to go beyond just the bachelor's degree.

The government is committed to providing subsidised education at the three universities for 25 percent of each Singaporean cohort by 2010.

Presently, the figure stands at around 23 per cent.

Going beyond the universities, Dr Tan said, Singapore would also consider how the polytechnics could be further developed.

Dr Tan said: "Our polytechnics are starting to collaborate with reputable foreign specialised institutions to offer degree courses in niche areas. These are areas that are currently not offered by our autonomous universities."

Officials from the Education Ministry say some of the courses being explored include food technology and hospitality.

Besides their roundtable discussions, the panel members are also meeting senior management, faculty members and students of the three universities to get first-hand inputs on their vision for Singapore's tertiary education sector and how it can be realised. - CNA/ir