Engineering with design the focus of fourth varsity

With yearly enrolment of 3,000, it will offer an education marrying different disciplines

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THE much-awaited fourth public- ly funded university will be ready in the next few years, and will eventually enrol up to 3,000 students each year.

It will also be inter-disciplinary in approach, most probably focusing on the interplay between the fields of design, engineering and business.

Minister of State for Education Lui Tuck Yew announced this yesterday, in answer to MPs who quizzed him on plans for a fourth university, as announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong last August.

With the fourth university, 30 per cent of every cohort of students will be able to attend university right here at home by 2015.

The National University of Singapore now takes in about 6,500 undergraduates yearly, the Nanyang Technological University about 5,800, and the Singapore Management University 1,500, rising to 2,000 by 2015.

Rear-Admiral (NS) Lui, who heads a 13-member panel looking into the setting up of the fourth university, noted that the panel he chairs does not want to just boost the number of university places.

It wants the fourth university to offer “solutions-directed research” that offers answers to problems faced by industry.

He cited Stanford University’s Institute of Design, where synergy between engineering, design and business disciplines “has been successfully demonstrated”.

The same synergy also led to products such as Apple’s iPhone and iPod Touch which, he said, were merchandise that “unlocks new value and which a whole generation raves about”.

The new university should encourage entrepreneurship by giving students the chance to start their own businesses, and allow them to go on internships and attachments, he said.

RADM Lui also explained why his panel had decided on an entirely new university rather than simply adding new campuses to the existing universities.

This offers the best chance of creating an institution that will develop its own unique model of education, he said.

Parent Roger Lim, 40, who hopes his two sons will get to study engineering in the new university, is excited about its different approach.

Said the engineer who had studied in Australia: “Here is the chance for the Government to try something new, to produce a new breed of graduates. It should not waste the opportunity and offer more of the same kind of courses.”

RADM Lui’s announcement on the fourth university was one among a slew of others on the education sector that his ministry made yesterday.

The others included the setting up of a liberal arts college, tighter regulation of private schools, and higher standards for pre-school teachers.

Other key moves
• A new specialised independent secondary school – the School of Science and Technology – will be set up in 2010.
• A small liberal arts college, probably to be affiliated to the National University of Singapore or the Singapore Management University, will be set up over the next few years.
• Private schools will face new and stricter standards set by the Education Ministry. They will need to qualify for a new EduTrust seal of approval from next year.
• Pre-school teachers need to have higher academic and teaching qualifications from next year.
• Extra counsellors for schools are among the new measures taken to reduce the school dropout rate.