

## Parliament Debate on ministries' budgets: Education



Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) students rehearsing for a dance performance. Both Nafa and Lasalle College of the Arts would continue as distinct colleges offering their own programmes. The "alliance" looks to create a more diverse range of opportunities for both students and faculty, said Education Minister Lawrence Wong. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

# Nafa, Lasalle to form S'pore's first arts university

**New institution to remain private but supported by Govt; colleges to retain their distinct identities**

Ng Wei Kai

A new university of the arts will be formed by an "alliance" between the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) and Lasalle College of the Arts, Minister for Education Lawrence Wong announced yesterday.

"Because of the quality and standards that both Lasalle and Nafa have achieved, I'm happy to share that the Ministry of Education (MOE) will grant the alliance its own degree-awarding powers, and also confer it university status. So this will be our first university of the arts in Singapore," he said in Parliament.

Mr Wong elaborated that the new university would remain private but supported by the Government, and that both Lasalle and Nafa would continue as distinct colleges offering their own programmes and retaining their distinct identities.

The move looks to create a more diverse range of opportunities for both students and faculty, he added, with more cross-institution modules and projects, and the pooling of resources.

Singaporeans and permanent residents enrolled in approved degree programmes at Lasalle and Nafa pay subsidised fees, comparable to those at autonomous universities.

Last year, Nafa had an intake of 130 Singaporeans and PRs across its degree programmes, while Lasalle had about 300. In response to queries from The Straits Times, both said they have seen healthy demand for their degree programmes in recent years.

Lasalle's president Steve Dixon said: "The alliance between both parties will be strengthened with expanded central services, as well as academic governance and quality assurance systems enabling the awarding of degrees in the name of the university. It will drive synergies between both colleges, and enhance capabilities in areas such as student support and industry partnerships."

Both colleges are locally established arts institutions which offer diplomas and degrees in various Asian and Western art forms, often in partnership with overseas uni-



Last year, Lasalle College of the Arts (above) took in 300 Singaporeans and permanent residents across its degree programmes, while Nafa had 130. Both have seen healthy demand for their degree programmes. ST FILE PHOTO

## AREAS OF COOPERATION

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LASALLE'S PRESIDENT STEVE DIXON

versities such as Goldsmiths and University of the Arts London. Nafa was founded in 1938 and Lasalle in 1984.

Ms Foo Mee Har (West Coast GRC), who also spoke in Parliament yesterday, emphasised the quality of Singapore's home-grown institutions, mentioning Nafa as an example of one with excellent outcomes.

"Singapore can encourage private education institutes to fill talent gaps in specialised fields, and to build best-in-class capabilities in niche areas and thereby complement the broad-based education offered by a public system," she said.

The new university is also intended to have a social role beyond simply providing skills and expertise.

Mr Wong said: "We envisage the university to contribute more to cultural life in Singapore and the region, and offer a stronger value proposition to its students and stakeholders."

"I hope the new arts university will take tertiary arts education in Singapore to greater heights - enabling our youth with strengths and talents in this field to maximise their potential and contribute to our economy and our society."

Former Nominated MP Terence Ho, who had said in 2019 that Singapore should consider granting full university status to both Nafa and Lasalle, said the move was a mile-

stone in the Singapore arts scene.

"Its significance is not really in producing more graduates; it's about gathering expertise together and being able to foster international connections."

"Things are different when you are speaking to foreign collaborators at a university-to-university level," Mr Ho said.

Following Mr Wong's announcement, Nafa posted on its Facebook page: "We are happy to share that the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts will establish a new alliance with our neighbour Lasalle to form Singapore's first full-fledged university of the arts."

Lasalle also said on its Facebook page: "The new university is anticipated to be set up within the next three to four years. It will leverage strengths from both institutions, while ensuring that our unique heritages continue to be cherished."

No date has been set for the opening of the new university, which will be supported by both MOE and the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth.

It is unclear at this time where the new university will be housed or if it to have a physical campus.

Ambassador Chan Heng Chee, former chair of the National Arts Council, will head a committee overseeing the implementation of the new alliance.

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