

Singapore to have first university focusing on arts in 2024

It will be an alliance between Lasalle and Nafa, and uni will start taking applications in 2023

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A new university called the University of the Arts Singapore (UAS) will open its doors in August 2024.

The university – the first in Singapore to focus on the arts – will be formed by an alliance between Lasalle College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) and start receiving applications in the third quarter of next year, said the Ministry of Education, Lasalle and Nafa in a joint statement yesterday.

MOE will give UAS the ability to grant degrees in areas such as fine arts and music, the ministry said in a press briefing yesterday, ending Lasalle and Nafa's current system of awarding degrees in partnership with reputable British universities.

Lasalle has partnered Goldsmiths University in London to validate its degrees since 2012, and Nafa started similar arrangements with Britain's Royal College of Music in 2011 and the University of the Arts London in January last year.

The last batches of students enrolling under these programmes will enter Lasalle in 2023 and Nafa in 2025 – but other collaborations, such as exchange programmes and joint projects, will continue, said the institutions in yesterday's briefing.

From then on, students at both institutions will receive degrees from UAS displaying credits along the lines of UAS-Nafa or UAS-Lasalle.

There will not be a new campus, said MOE, as UAS will operate out of the National Design Centre in Middle Road.

UAS will provide some centralised services to both Lasalle and Nafa, which will remain distinct entities, enrolling and admitting their own students and conducting their own courses, MOE said, although there will be modules offered across institutes.

Adopting this model – where Nafa and Lasalle remain separate but are overseen by the new university – will allow the institu-

tions to keep their distinct identity and heritage while elevating them, said MOE.

Nafa was founded in 1938 and Lasalle in 1984.

An MOE spokesman said: "Singapore's future economy will need talent not only from the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines, but also from the arts and humanities, and that is where UAS will come in to nurture them."

She added that UAS will be a platform to plug Nafa and Lasalle into the industry, be a national focal point for the arts and bring more opportunities for students and faculty.

The university's board will be chaired by Filipino banker, former politician and private art collector Jose Isidro "Lito" Camacho, who is managing director and vice-chairman of Credit Suisse Asia-Pacific.

He has appointed Professor Kwok Kian Woon, currently associate vice-president for well-being at Nanyang Technological University, as the new university's inaugural vice-chancellor and chief executive, the statement said.

Former Nominated MP Terence Ho – who called for a fully fledged arts university in Parliament in 2019 – said he hopes the new leadership will look closely into the curriculum to make sure graduates fit into the Arts 2.0 Ecosystem. This is a plan by the National Arts Council for the development of Singapore's arts scene, set to run from 2023 to 2027.

Intercultural Theatre Institute co-founder and director T. Sasitharan said Prof Kwok is a terrific choice for leader of the new university.

"He's been involved in and is a keen observer of the Singapore arts scene," he added.

On UAS granting degrees, Mr Sasitharan said: "It is about time Nafa and Lasalle decolonise and Singapore confers its own arts degrees. It signifies a long overdue coming of age for arts education in Singapore."

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