

Universities are agents for city-wide change: Ong Ye Kung



Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) and Second Minister for Defence Ong Ye Kung speaking at the closing ceremony of the Asian Undergraduate Summit (AUS). ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

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SINGAPORE - Universities can play a huge part in transforming cities, as they help to transform knowledge into new ideas, new businesses and new jobs, said Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung on Monday (July 3).

"A university can be a tremendous generative and regenerative force for economies and societies, and help us stay resilient despite all the changes we see," he said.

Mr Ong was speaking at the closing ceremony of the Asian Undergraduate Summit held at the National University Singapore's (NUS) UTown Auditorium.

He cited the example of Bordeaux, previously a polluted industrial complex. It is now a centre of innovation and enterprise in France, due to its close proximity to the University of Bordeaux as well as specialised engineering and business schools, he said.

Pittsburgh also had massive job losses and urban decay after the United States steel industry was downsized in the 1980s, he added. Responding to this, its universities - in particular, Carnegie Mellon University - introduced courses such as biotechnology, IT and clean energy, to explore high-technology sectors. Since then, the city has attracted tech giants such as Google, Uber and Facebook.

"In recent years, Singapore's universities are also putting greater emphasis on inculcating an entrepreneurial spirit amongst their students," said Mr Ong.

This is evident from NUS' Overseas Colleges, the Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Overseas Entrepreneurship Programme and the Singapore Institute of Technology's (SIT) Enterprise Immersion Programme.

The Asian Undergraduate Summit, a student-led initiative by students from NUS' University Scholars Programme, involved some 200 local and overseas participants. It is supported by philanthropic organisation Temasek Foundation Connects, set up by Temasek Holdings.

The summit examined how disruptive change impacts stakeholders in society, and proposed ideas related to the topic. These include a parking app which allows users to book a carpark space in advance, and a robot to meet the daily needs of senior citizens.