

# New committee to guide AI use across higher-education sector

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## New committee to guide AI use across higher-education sector

**‘System-level’ approach vital with AI evolving rapidly, says Desmond Lee**

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A new committee will guide the next stage of AI use and adoption across Singapore’s higher-education sector.

The Committee for Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education will provide strategic direction and oversight to improve collaboration across all institutes of higher learning (IHLs), said Education Minister Desmond Lee on April 1.

It will also deepen sharing of good practices and developments in AI, he added.

Mr Lee was speaking at The Straits Times Education Forum, titled AI in Higher Education: Hype or Hope?, held at Singapore Management University’s (SMU) Yong Pung How School of Law on April 1.

The 2026 forum, held in partnership with SMU, addressed the use of AI in higher education and discussed learning and assessments in the age of machines.

Chaired by Mr Lee, the committee will include Senior Minister of State for Education Janil Puthuchery, as well as the presidents, principals and chief executives of Singapore’s universities, polytechnics, and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

Mr Lee said that while individual institutions already have work groups to share best practices, a “system-level” approach is now required to identify opportunities and address challenges collectively, as AI continues to evolve rapidly.

“By strengthening sharing and coordination at the leadership level... we can build on existing efforts and move with greater purpose and ambition, not only adapting to change, but shaping it proactively as the future of higher learning and our campuses evolves,” he said.



(From left) SMU vice-president of partnerships and engagement and Lee Kong Chian Professor of Communication and Technology Lim Sun Sun, OpenAI head of education for Asia-Pacific Raghav Gupta, Education Minister Desmond Lee and SMU provost Alan Chan listening to a student during the question and answer segment at The Straits Times Education Forum 2026, held at the SMU’s Yong Pung How School of Law on April 1. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

Mr Lee said the Ministry of Education will strengthen research on how AI can advance tertiary-level teaching, by supporting inter-IHL AI projects through its Tertiary Education Research Fund.

“This will bring together educators and researchers to explore innovative approaches to learning, generate evidence on what works, and translate these insights into teaching practice across our institutions,” he added.

He said that this work within the higher-education sector supports broader efforts led by the new National AI Council chaired by the Prime Minister.

Addressing the audience of 500

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members of the public, Mr Lee noted that education systems have never been static, and have adapted alongside changes in society and technology.

However, the rapid rise of AI marks a “major technological shift”

that brings both opportunities and risks, he said.

AI excels in “horizontal” capabilities, or general tasks like summarising information, while “vertical” capabilities involve deep, domain-specific expertise and real-world judgment, said Mr Lee.

“We must equip students not just with the ability to use ‘horizontal’ AI tools, but with the depth of knowledge and judgment to use them well in ‘vertical’ applications that will be true game changers,” he added.

These abilities will be built gradually from primary school to the IHL level, and will “fundamentally reshape the classroom and campus”

into spaces for active questioning, problem solving, teamwork and continuous learning, said Mr Lee.

AI will be introduced only at the Primary 4 level, under close supervision and “low exposure”, he said, with priority given to learning the fundamentals.

Later on, AI usage will increase, with such tools functioning like a teacher – prompting students to think and asking them questions – rather than spoon-feeding answers or giving lazy shortcuts.

At the IHL level, students must both make use of AI and deepen independent thinking, said Mr Lee.

This vision requires a rethink of how educators teach and do their

work, he added, with such efforts already in place across Singapore’s campuses.

At the National University of Singapore, AI is used to drive productivity by freeing up educators from repetitive tasks, Mr Lee said, citing an AI tool used to grade English competency tests for 3,000 students annually.

This tool has saved over 100 man-days of work while maintaining 95 per cent accuracy, he added.

Similarly, staff at the ITE are using AI tools to generate initial drafts of teaching materials, which they then customise for their students’ specific needs, Mr Lee said.

The five polytechnics have started a joint project using AI analytics to identify at-risk or underperforming students early, allowing for more timely intervention, he said.

At the Singapore University of Social Sciences, an adaptive learning system flags individual learning gaps and provides real-time feedback and hints to help learners level up.

Meanwhile, students must also be equipped to apply AI meaningfully within their disciplines, said Mr Lee, while strengthening “uniquely human abilities” such as critical thinking and cross-cultural understanding that AI cannot replicate.

He cited examples from the Singapore University of Technology and Design, where master’s degree students used custom-built AI agents to translate urban planning ideas into instantaneous visuals and provide technical feedback.

At SMU, students in a “Storytelling with AI” course created marketing videos that have impressed industry representatives.

Equipping students with skills continues after graduation and throughout their careers, said Mr Lee, adding that a new tool developed by SkillsFuture Singapore and the Singapore Institute of Technology is meant to help individuals assess their AI readiness and find suitable courses.

From the second half of 2026, all IHLs will offer selected AI-related courses at significant discounts for their alumni for a period of one year, he added.

“If we treat AI as a shortcut to simply bypass thinking, we will diminish the very purpose of education,” Mr Lee said.

“But if we treat AI as a catalyst tool, a powerful tool to sharpen what truly matters in education, it can strengthen our IHLs and our people.”

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