

# NUS to pump \$11m into digital media institute

By **ROLAND LIM**

HOT on the heels of the government's initiative to boost research into digital media, the National University of Singapore (NUS) said yesterday it has set aside \$11 million over the next three years to start an Interactive and Digital Media Institute (IDMI).

NUS deputy president of research and technology Barry Halliwell told a news briefing that besides the NUS investment, IDMI is expected to attract external grants.

IDMI aims to attract 160 PhD and Masters students to produce research across eight areas — mixed reality, sociable robotics, games, ambient intelligence, multimedia sensing, social and cognitive, arts and creativity, and multimodal analysis.

"I think slightly less than

half (of the researchers) will be Singaporeans," said Hang Chang Chieh, chairman of IDMI's management board. The rest will be graduate students from the region.

IDMI hopes to spin off companies that can commercialise its research. Adrian Cheok, who heads the mixed reality laboratory, with one of his researchers and other investors, recently started the company MXR Corporation, which produces interactive storytelling software that uses two cubes to interact with children.

Education institutes here have been busy setting up and expanding operations to produce manpower for the interactive digital media (IDM) industry.

Later this year, US-based DigiPen Institute of Technology's first Asian

campus is expected to kick off an undergraduate programme at Fusionpolis. And Egg Story Digital Arts Academy, part of Singapore-based animation studio Egg Story Creative Production, is expected to start a two-year diploma course in July.

Local polytechnics such as Republic, Ngee Ann, Temasek, Nanyang and Singapore Poly all offer IDM-related courses. Nanyang Technological University's School of Art, Design and Media, as well as its School of Communication and Information, and Singapore Management University also offer IDM-related courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The government is investing \$1 billion to boost the industry, which is forecast to be worth \$10 billion by 2018.