

NTU offering courses in earth sciences

■ BY CHUANG BING HAN

FIELD trips to active volcanoes and earthquake sites are in store for students of Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) Division of Earth Sciences – the first of its kind in a Singapore university.

The division – set up last month – will open its doors to its first five to 10 students this August, when it launches its doctorate programme. It is currently in the process of recruiting staff as well.

It is also proposing to have a master's course in the near future, followed by an undergraduate programme on earth sciences, when it has enough faculty.

The Division of Earth Sciences will be housed in the School of Physical and Mathematical Sciences (SPMS).

Given the presence of the Earth Observatory of Singapore (EOS) on campus, NTU is well-positioned to produce graduates who are knowledgeable in earth sciences

and their impact on society, said the SPMS chair, Professor Ling San.

The EOS was established in February last year to conduct fundamental research on earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and climate change in the South-east Asian region.

Currently, the only option for Singapore students who want to pursue similar courses is a minor in geosciences at the National University of Singapore's geography department.

The NUS geography department welcomed the new NTU division, saying they complement each other.

"There will be more opportunities for people who are interested in geosciences," said Prof David Higgitt, 44, deputy head of the department, adding that the subject it offered as a minor was popular among undergraduates.

The EOS also said it received "very positive and enthusiastic" feedback from a pi-

lot module that it conducted with a group of Raffles Institution Secondary 3 students last October, said EOS's group leader of volcano research, Prof Chris Newhall.

"It was a very unique experience," said Ong Chuan Kai, 15, a student who attended the module. "I'll definitely want to find out more, especially in handling the aftermath of disasters. I find it's more relevant to me and the world I'm living in."

The EOS is confident students will be drawn to the new course. "One of the prime attractions of earth sciences is the field trips," said Prof Newhall. "Field work is at the core of what we do here. We have to go to where the action is."

The overseas trips will take the students to geological sites in the region. They could last from two days to a couple of weeks, depending on the school term and destination.

Field trips in the May to July break can last up to a month.