Education ministry sets up committee to study fourth university

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By Danny Tan

In 2015, the Education Ministry will set up a committee to study the expansion of the university sector, in response to the increasing demand for university places.

The committee, to be co-chaired by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, will look into the feasibility of establishing new universities, as well as the role of existing universities.

Minister Masagos Zulkifli said: “We need to ensure that we have enough places for students who want to go to university.”

The committee will be co-chaired by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, and will include representatives from universities, the private sector, and civil society.

The committee will submit its report by the end of 2015.

Minister for Education Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam said that with the expansion of higher education in the past 10 years, NUS, NTU and SMU have all gained good international reputation. SMU might initially have been perceived as a second-rate university accepting second-rate students who were not able to make it into NUS and NTU. However, SMU has quickly proven that this was not true and that it was a top choice with many university applicants. The market has to decide on the success of the new fourth university.

On the point about when the new university will start enrolment, Minister Tharman said that SMU took three years from the conceptualization stage to recruiting its first batch of students. However, that was the experience of SMU and the new university might not necessarily also require three years of preparation. It could be earlier but it all depends on the final recommendation of the committee. On the setting up of a fourth university, SMU Deputy President and Provost Professor Tan Chin Tiong said: “SMU welcomes the establishment of a fourth publicly-funded university in Singapore. One or more new universities will add diversity to the local tertiary education landscape.”