Even as a committee deliberates on the shape that Singapore's fourth university should take, Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam has hinted at the possibility of a fifth or sixth.

"Several of us feel that we need more universities over time, whether it's five or six," Mr Shanmugaratnam told reporters.

One way to set up a new institution was the Singapore Management University way: "From scratch" and separate. "We surprised everyone and succeeded. High-risk, they lowered the risks by tying up with Wharton," he said.

Then there was the Nanyang Technological University example, which started as the Nanyang Technological Institute, a part of the National University of Singapore, before breaking away eventually. "It's somewhat a safer strategy. Both are options worth looking at carefully," Mr Shanmugaratnam said.

He added, the fourth university could even be a product of both strategies, and it was important that it not be "just an expansion of numbers but a differentiation".

Referring to the work of the committee headed by the Minister of State for Education, Mr Shanmugaratnam said: "Lui Tuck Yew's committee has a large job, we don't want to rush him. They want to study overseas experiences and I am sure there will be more ideas along the way."