Fourth university in Singapore to partner with MIT

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A PARTNERSHIP with a top American university comes with the expectation of high-calibre student intake.

So, admissions will be scaled down for Singapore’s fourth state-funded university, which has chosen the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to help develop its primarily science and technology curriculum and to kick start its major research programmes, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen announced yesterday.

Top faculty from MIT, which was chosen from a group of other brand-name American universities that had submitted proposals, will also be teaching students.

The Ministry of Education expects the research-intensive university to eventually have an undergraduate population of 4,000 eventually, and about 7,000 to 8,000 with postgraduate students — similar to the size of the Singapore Management University.

Previous reports placed student admissions between 2,000 and 2,500 annually, with an undergraduate population of up to 12,000.

“In our discussions with our partners, it was clear that there would have to be some trade-off between quality and quantity ... You can't realistically take students of varying calibre, as some of them will struggle in the courses,” replied Dr Ng to a question on the smaller enrolment.
A S’pore-MIT partnership

With students from top American and Chinese universities coming, “sensibly, we also want Singaporeans who can match their calibre”, he said, while noting that the “sizing was estimates”.

“I’m not precluding a larger intake,” he added. “The issue is really on quality that is consistent with our choice of partners and the way we position this university.”

But the 30-per-cent university admission target for each cohort by 2015 still stands, due to the set-up of the Singapore Institute of Applied Technology for polytechnic graduates. An MIT-type education will cost more, though, and the Government is willing to provide higher subsidies, said Dr Ng.

MIT president Susan Hockfield said this “exciting next step” is “a natural outgrowth of our shared interest in world-class science and engineering based education, design and innovation”.

The National University of Singapore also welcomed its entry. NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan said, “The collaboration between Singapore’s new university and MIT will offer additional opportunities for our institutions to work together.”

MOE is still in discussions with a few potential top Chinese university partners for a second partnership, with a decision expected later this year, said Dr Ng. The fourth university will open with an initial intake of 500 students in 2011, in an undisclosed temporary location. It will move to Upper Changi in 2013.