

ASEAN

# Minister calls for long-term student visas

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**HANOI:** Students from Asean member states should have better access to long-term visas to study in other member nations, says Education Minister Phongthep Thepkanchana.

He called on the 10 countries of Asean to allow foreign students from other member states to apply for long-term visas.

Mr Phongthep said visas granted to Asean students to study in other Asean countries should match the length of their courses.

Foreign students studying in Thailand are currently required to have their visas extended every year regardless of the length of their programmes, he said.

Handing out long-term visas would help promote integration in the region ahead of the introduction of the Asean Community in 2015, he said.

"The visa processing system in Southeast Asia does not promote student mobility in the region," he said.

Mr Phongthep made his remarks after the closing of the 47th Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Council Conference. It was held last week in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The conference comprises 11 education ministers from SEAMEO member countries and high-ranking education officials worldwide who discuss policy and regional initiatives on education, science and culture.

Thailand will host the next SEAMEO Council Conference in 2015. The summit is organised every two years.

Mr Phongthep said all Asean education ministers agree that student visa durations should be increased to boost mobility and integration in the region.

Making the changes will not be easy and will require discussion among several organisations, he added.

Witaya Jeradechakul, director of the SEAMEO secretariat based in Thailand, said the organisation will play a key role in boosting mobility and exchanges of students and teachers in Asean.