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The photo shows a building of Chung Hsing University in Taichung

MOE allows two Taiwanese universities to raise fees after 14 years of tuition freeze

(By Sophia Yang, Taiwan News, Staff Writer) **Sixteen Taiwanese universities sought tuition increase for the upcoming school year, but only two have been given a green light by the Ministry of Education**

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) - Taiwan's education authority rejected applications for tuition increases proposed by 14 universities, while two universities in central and southern Taiwan are allowed to raise fees, after their 14 and 13 years of freeze, respectively.

In May, Shih Hsin University and 15 other universities in Taiwan sought permission from the Ministry of Education (MOE) to hike tuition and fees by 2 to 3 percent for the 2018 academic year.

On June 23, the ministry approved the hike plans made by two universities: National Chung Hsing University in Taichung, and Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages in Kaohsiung, with only a 2 percent increase allowed, which was lower than the proposed three percent and 2.5 percent, respectively.

Students against hike plan

In late May, a student group at Shih Hsin University protested the plan, saying that combined costs for tuition and living expenses over the course of four years would exceed NT\$1 million (US\$0.33 million) after the hike.

The Alliance Against Commercialization of Education (反教育商品化聯盟) said that more than a dozen schools, including National Taiwan University of Science and Technology and Shih Hsin, have sought permission to hike tuition and fees this school year. The alliance advised that the ministry should allocate more budget to subsidize schools to cut tuition and fees progressively to ease the financial burden for students.

Why were only two universities allowed to raise fees?

The Director of Higher Education of MOE Nicole Lee (李彥儀) said last Saturday that the schools which were not given approval for tuition hikes either inadequately communicate with students about tuition plans, lack budget transparency in spending, or have insufficient sponsorship plans for financially disadvantaged students.

The two schools given the green light will be eligible to increase tuition fees from this school year, with approved increase of two percent, lower than their proposed percentage of increase.

Tuition hikes were last seen in the 2005 academic year for National Chung Hsing University, and in 2006 for Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, according to Lee. Chung Hsiung is said to have charged students the lowest tuition compared to its counterparts in the country.

University teachers upset with the decision

An university teacher told China Times that it is unreasonable to freeze tuition and fees for years as food prices continue to rise year over year, and schools have to spend more on upgrading learning facilities.

Shih Chien University President Michael J. K. Chen told media that local universities are struggling with fewer students thanks to reduced birth rates, and increased costs of wages and insurance coverage for teaching assistants. Chen said his school has seen an increase of spending by NT\$40 million a year but is now not allowed to increase tuition. He added that local private schools are suffering from an exceptional amount of stress under the imposed tuition freeze.