

Varsities open more places for non-academic talents

NUS, NTU, SMU to offer up to 2,240 spots via discretionary admission scheme this year

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More students who fall short of the entry score for a degree course can be considered based on their talents in various fields, including the arts and sports. Up to 2,240 university places will be available this year under the discretionary admission (DA) scheme.

The National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singa-

pore Management University (SMU) will increase the places for the DA scheme, from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of their intake. This translates to about 1,050 places at NUS, 900 at NTU and 290 at SMU.

The total university intake figures for this year are still being finalised, but the Ministry of Education (MOE) said the number of places will increase by a few hundred.

This is in line with the Government's plan to increase the cohort participation rate to 40 per cent by 2020. It means four in 10 pupils from each Primary 1 cohort will

go on to pursue a full-time degree in one of Singapore's six publicly funded universities. Last year, 15,500 places were offered and the cohort participation rate rose to 33 per cent, from 32 per cent in 2015.

MOE announced last year that the tertiary institutions, including polytechnics, will place greater emphasis on holistic selection practices for admissions, and said there was room to admit more students through the DA scheme.

With the increase, university officials said they are likely to cast a wider net and shortlist more students under the scheme, which was introduced in 2004. Admission officials use personal essays, aptitude tests, portfolios and interviews to assess students.

NUS provost Tan Eng Chye said the university is likely to shortlist and interview more than 2,000 students this year for admissions under the DA scheme. However, he stressed that applicants would still need good grades.

He said: "At the end of the day, we have to be sure that the student will be able to take the rigours of a degree programme."

SMU provost Lily Kong said the university welcomes the increase as it recognises the value of a student body with diverse interests and talents. Over the years, the university has admitted sportsmen, artists and students with a passion for community service and entrepreneurship.

NTU deputy provost for education Kam Chan Hin said of stu-

dents admitted under the scheme: "The vast majority are able to cope with their studies, with some performing very well as they are a lot more driven after being admitted into a programme that they are passionate about."

Professor Tan said giving as much as 10 per cent of the places through the DA scheme since 2004 has helped NUS inject more diversity into its student body.

While NUS did not provide figures, the increased diversity is evident in its most competitive faculties, such as law and medicine.

These have, in recent years, accepted more students from polytechnics as well as students from a wider range of junior colleges.

Polytechnic graduate Sean Koh, 25, who was admitted into SMU's information systems degree course, impressed admission officials with his coding skills and experience working in two IT start-ups.

"I had a diploma in real estate and my GPA (grade point average) fell short of the entry score required. If not for the discretionary admission scheme, I would not have had a place in the IT degree course which really interests me," he said.

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