

Three local universities increase places for Discretionary Admission scheme from 10 to 15 per cent

More room for holistic admissions

✔ SANDRA DAVIE, THE STRAITS TIMES

More students who fall short of the entry score for a degree course can be considered on their talent 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 Singapore Management University (SMU) will increase the places for the discretionary scheme – from 10 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 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.

This means that four in 10 students 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 given out and the cohort participation rate rose to 33 per cent, up from 32 per cent in 2015.

MOE had announced last year that 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 discretionary 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 applicants.

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."

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the university welcomes the increase as it recognises the value of a student body with diverse interests and talents.

Over the years, the university had admitted sportsmen, artists and students who have a passion for community service and entrepreneurship.

PASSION

NTU's deputy provost for education Kam Chan Hin said of students 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."

Prof Tan said giving as much as 10 per cent of the places through DA 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 and students from a wider range of junior colleges.

Mr Eng De Sheng, 25, a final-year NUS computer engineering student, was admitted for his interest in computers.

Since his secondary school days, he has been freelancing – offering diagnostics and repairs for computers.

Recently, he created an application that would alert bus passengers when they are arriving at their bus stop.

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

He said: "I had a diploma in real estate and my GPA fell short of the entry score required.

"If not for the discretionary admission scheme, I would not have got a place in the IT degree course which really interests me."

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