

NUS Law scheme to broaden student diversity

Ng Wei Kai

The National University of Singapore's (NUS) law faculty wants to take in more students from different schools to broaden the diversity of its student body. It plans to do so via a pilot initiative, starting this year, that will give the top 5 per cent of the student cohort at any junior college or Millennia Institute the chance to take an admission test and interview for its Bachelor of Laws (LLB) programme.

This will be determined by their results in the A-level exams, the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma exams or equivalent, said NUS in a statement on Monday.

To be eligible, they must also select law as their first choice in their applications to NUS.

Currently, some 2,000 students apply to the LLB programme each year. About 800 of them are short-listed for the written test and interview, and 240 are eventually admitted to the course. The pilot programme is expected to add about 50 students to the shortlist for the interview and written test.

These candidates will be in addition to those short-listed through the regular process based on academic scores and discretionary admissions recognising excellence in non-academic areas.

All candidates go through the same rigorous selection process, said NUS.

Law faculty dean Simon Chesterman told *The Straits Times* in an interview yesterday: "We are looking at improving diversity in two ways – firstly in terms of skills and knowledge, and secondly in terms of the backgrounds of our students."

He said students from well-represented JCs will not be overlooked in favour of those shortlisted as part of this pilot programme. "It means that we will do more interviews to see these students," he said.

In 2012, the faculty said it would review its admissions criteria to attract more diverse applicants, including looking at the kinds of students it would admit under the discretionary admission scheme.

The faculty is also looking to smooth the transition for transfer students from other NUS degree courses by allowing their first-year modules in a different subject to be counted towards their four years in law school. Currently, most students who transfer do not have their first-year academic credits counted, resulting in them taking five years to graduate instead of the usual four.

"These students, like our exchange students from overseas, will bring with them an injection of talent and perspective from other disciplines," said Professor Chesterman. He added that technological and business knowledge is becoming increasingly relevant in the legal profession and that diversity in the student body was a way to fill this knowledge gap.

ngweikai@sph.com.sg