

Evaluate Varsity Applicants More Holistically

The Straits Times Forum Online Story (September 26, 2013)

THE editorial calling for more inclusive entry into universities is well-intentioned but falls short when it comes to specific recommendations ("Making higher education more inclusive"; Sept 13).

At present, the National University of Singapore admits applicants based on their "academic standing, course selection and competition among applicants". Other accomplishments and work experience feature only in "exceptional cases".

The heavy emphasis on examination grades is also apparent in the use of the pedantic indicative grade profile, which reflects the grade profiles of the 10th and 90th percentiles of applicants offered places in the previous year.

The worry is that the status quo precludes those who might have performed unsatisfactorily in a single high-stakes exam, but excelled elsewhere.

The need to look beyond grades is certainly gaining traction.

A proportional approach and holistic evaluation of an applicant could mean assigning different weightings to various components.

For example, a 70 per cent weighting for the applicant's A-level results or grade point average, 15 per cent for co-curricular activities and 15 per cent for leadership and practical experience. Qualitative methods - in the form of personal statements, essays and interviews - could also be considered.

There will be questions over how achievements can be quantified and compared - how would community service stack up against sporting or musical achievements, for instance? But it may be worth it if we can make higher education more inclusive.

Kwan Jin Yao