

Addenda to President's Address

Correspondent's take

Build more routes for students to hit their peaks



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In line with the Ministry of Education's (MOE) move to place less emphasis on academic results

as schools focus on nurturing all-rounded students, post-secondary and tertiary institutions will now adopt a more holistic admissions process.

These plans by MOE were outlined yesterday by Acting Education Ministers Ng Chee Meng (Schools) and Ong Ye Kung (Higher Education and Skills).

They were set out in an addendum to President Tony Tan Keng Yam's Address in Parliament last Friday, when he mapped out the Government's goals and policies for its new five-year term.

The ministry also said more

university places will be available for Singaporeans in the next five years.

The Singapore Institute of Technology and SIM University, which focus more on applied learning, will launch more degree programmes to match the diverse aspirations of Singaporeans, for instance.

But what will be welcomed as well is the announcement that tertiary institutions will place greater emphasis on holistic selection practices for admissions.

The ministry officials had signalled that there is room to admit more students through the

discretionary admissions scheme. Currently, only a fraction of polytechnic and university students are admitted on a discretionary basis.

The five polytechnics were allowed to admit only up to 7.5 per cent of their intake on a discretionary basis while the limit for universities is 10 per cent.

In all, the polytechnics took in 24,000 students last year, and the six universities, a record 15,000 for their degree courses.

The polytechnics and universities use a range of criteria for discretionary enrolment. These

include recommendations, interviews and portfolio evaluations to assess the passions, strengths and competencies of students.

They do it without compromising on minimum admission standards. Applicants still need to demonstrate that they have a reasonable chance of completing their courses.

As Mr Ong noted in a speech last year, educators must recognise that young Singaporeans have diverse interests and innate abilities.

It is important to take young people's aspirations into account if Singapore wants to build a system that encourages them to go far and dive deep in their chosen careers.

This does not necessarily clash with the broader role of education, which is to serve the country's economic needs by training enough manpower in specified fields.

As Mr Ong himself argued then, a rethink is needed on the role of higher education. The "collective good" can also be attained by letting people pursue their passions.

"Every Singaporean counts, and he or she can only count if the system allows maximum play of what he or she can do and is best at doing," he said.

Widening students' access to further education in fields of their choice would also fulfil Singapore's desire for a "mountain range of talents", to use the words of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in his 2005 National Day Rally.

It is time to redouble efforts to build more routes to the many peaks we envision for our young Singaporeans.

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