Polytechnic grads put squeeze on university places

Over half of this year's batch of 21,000 want to go on to university; overwhelming demand for 'hot' courses

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STUDENTS eyeing a university place have a couple more weeks to apply, but this already looks like another tough year to get in.

The reason: the three universities are looking at a bumper crop of applications from polytechnic graduates.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) held an early admissions exercise for poly graduates and both saw a surge in numbers, partly because 1988's Dragon Year babies are graduating from the five polytechnics.

The NUS received 8,444 applications, up from 6,600 last year, while NTU had 2,000 more, setting a new record of 11,800 poly graduates seeking admission.

As most would have applied to both universities, admission officials estimate that more than half of this year's 21,000 poly graduates want to continue to university.

Not yet factored in are junior college students who just received their A-level results, as well as foreigners and repeat applicants who failed to get in before and will try again.

The Government has said that with the 14,700 places it is providing this year at the three universities, slightly more than 25 per cent of the cohort should get places.

But there might still be a crunch for some courses. The universities expect certain "hot" courses to be oversubscribed many times over, and this just means it will be harder to get in without strong grades.

Last year's most sought-after courses included arts and social sciences, mass communications, real estate and project facilities management.

There was less demand from well-qualified applicants for courses such as electrical and electronic engineering, computing and science.

NUS vice-provost (Education) Tan Thiam Soon said early indications are that some courses such as business and accountancy are again in great demand this year.

Advising students to consider other courses, he said their career options need not be limited. "Many engineering and science graduates are snapped up every year by the banking and finance sectors," he said.

NTU's admissions dean Loh Nee Lam made a similar pitch, saying that many corporate chiefs trained as engineers and engineers are in great demand here and overseas.

The universities are expecting a slight drop in A-level applicants, as this year's batch born in 1989 is about 1,800 fewer than the Dragon cohort who applied last year.

Singapore sees more babies born every Dragon Year, which is considered auspicious by the Chinese.

Last year, applications from A-level and poly students hit record levels at the NUS, NTU and the Singapore Management University, and it meant far more applicants than places available.

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