



## POLY GRADS' ASPIRATIONS

# Consider a different varsity

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I REFER to the letters by Madam Irene Koh and Madam Tan Joo Kim ("Poly grads' uni frustration" and "Don't force them to give up higher education"; Forum Online, last Saturday).

Singapore has three universities that have consistently vied for top spots in the university league tables and they have done reasonably well in competing with top overseas universities in recent years.

However, they simply cannot cope with the rising aspirations of many Singaporeans who see tertiary education as a necessary prerequisite to land a decent job in Singapore today, but do not qualify under the current criteria.

Continued expansion of the capacity of the existing universities will create at least two problems:

- One, the universities may simply be unable to cope with more students. As it is, they are already overcrowded.
- Two, if they were to accept students with vastly different capabilities, professors would have to radically alter their syllabuses to ensure that no one is left behind.

This would have the detrimental effect of jeopardis-

ing the universities' efforts to remain world class.

However, the current state of affairs is unsustainable. There are only two alternatives for students who cannot land a place in the three universities in Singapore.

- First, they can choose to forgo their aspirations to pursue a tertiary education.
- Second, they can choose to go overseas if their parents are sufficiently well-off.

The former is clearly undesirable, and as for the latter, the student will likely remain abroad after the completion of his studies and Singapore will lose a talented son or daughter.

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So what is a potential solution? Let us look at other countries whose university systems are well-established. Britain has top universities such as Cambridge and Oxford. Not everyone who wants to can be admitted to these top schools.

Britain also has many other universities whose target audience is different from that of Cambridge and Oxford. The same holds for countries such as the United States and Australia.

What I suggest, then, is for the Ministry of Education to see to the aspirations of all members of the academic spectrum in Singapore by establishing a university that may not be constantly competing for top honours but, nonetheless, serves the purpose of educating students who may not qualify for the existing three universities, but are clearly competent enough for tertiary education.

Will anyone choose to attend such a university? My guess is an unequivocal yes.

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