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University banding system failing students

Comment › Letters

Last week, it was reported that students admitted into Polytechnic University's higher diploma programme in civil engineering actually scored better in the Joint University Programmes Admissions System than students admitted into the bachelor degree version of the same subject. This is intriguing, as local students usually prefer a degree programme over a higher diploma programme. Perhaps the problem is due to the banding of programme choices in the system.

Here is a first-hand example from someone I know. "Alice", scoring an average of 3.5 in six subjects, was admitted to the engineering programme in university A, a so-called top local university. "Ben" scored much better (average of 4 with two stars), but was admitted to the engineering programme in university B, which most locals would regard as a lesser university. Ben also wanted the engineering programme in university A, but he worried that his Diploma of Secondary Education test result would not be good enough, so he eventually put university A only in band B. Alice was more gung-ho and was handsomely rewarded.

Local universities do not like to admit students who put them in any other band but A, because admitting such students would make the admission statistics look bad. This defeats the purpose of letting students choose 20 programmes. The latest statistics from the joint admissions system's office shows that 86 per cent of seats went to band A choices. (Each student may list only three band A choices.)

I suggest the joint admissions system office let students rank their priorities (instead of banding), but do not allow the universities to see those preferences. This prevents the institutions from choosing students to beautify their admission statistics. The purpose of the joint admissions system is to make sure that the right seats go to the right people. Banding undermines this purpose.

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