Hiring: Grades matter but other factors vital

Good scores help but many firms also look for certain character traits, say bosses at forum

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Companies are still drawn to good grades as these are a strong sign of a prospective employee’s capability, leading employers said at a forum organised by the Nanyang Technological University Students’ Union yesterday. HOME B2

It can review curricula vitae, collect applicants’ responses for pre-screening questions, and conduct psychometric profiling assessments.

Other employers said they look for different character traits such as curiosity, humility and a willingness to learn.

Singapore Tourism Board chairman Chaly Mah said more companies are assessing candidates through internship programmes, workshops and team projects.

Mr Chong brought up a scholarship candidate who did not get a perfect score, but during an interview displayed “curiosity and a desire to explore”.

“He wrote about bitcoin in his essay and I engaged him in conversation about the different cryptocurrencies,” said Mr Chng.

“Titles come and go, but there’s no substitute for values,” said Mr Chng. “I learnt he lives in a two-room flat... but he saves up his own money to invest. That’s what employers are looking for. Part of that is reflected in your grades and CV, part of it in your interview answers.”

However, in response to the discussion, Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, who was patron and guest of honour at the conference, said: “If everyone thinks like that, why is it that in society, among students, they feel like grades are still so important?”

He added: “Are those the only answers, and do we therefore have to settle with the situation today, or do we still see HR practices evolving further today?”

Mr Danny Yong, chief investment officer and founding partner of Dymon Asia Capital, said: “A lot of learning is done on the job and not in school. The most important ingredient for success is opportunity.”

He threw out a challenge to the other employers – to hire up to 10 per cent of employees “blind to resumes and grades”, but instead choose them based on their traits.

In a five-minute speech on the same topic, Singapore Management University undergraduate Tan Xin Hao said: “Titles come and go, but there’s no substitute for values... which cannot be picked up within the four walls of a classroom. Would you prefer a second-class honours graduate with stellar leadership experience, or a first-class who has no heart to groom the next generation?”