

6 Firms still look at grades

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(From left) Ms Vanessa Ng, senior vice-president of human resources, Singapore Airlines; Ms Kathy Lai, deputy chief executive officer, Enterprise Singapore; Mr Chng Kai Fong, managing director, Economic Development Board; Mr Chaly Mah, chairman, Singapore Tourism Board; Mr Douglas Foo, president, Singapore Manufacturing Federation; and moderator Darryl David, chief executive officer of SJI International; at the forum on employability yesterday. ST PHOTO: JONATHAN CHOO

Hiring: Grades matter but other factors vital

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

Jolene Ang

Companies are still drawn to good grades as these are a strong sign of a prospective employee's capability, leading employers told students yesterday. But other factors, such as how candidates work under pressure, are increasingly being considered in the hiring process.

Speaking at a forum on employability organised by the Nanyang Technological University Students' Union, Economic Development Board managing director Chng Kai Fong said: "Everyone is trying to shift away from an emphasis on

grades but there is no substitute." However, he stressed that "good grades" do not necessarily equate with a perfect score, adding that even a shortlisted candidate with a perfect score may not get the job.

DBS chief executive Piyush Gupta, who delivered a keynote speech, said that from a human resource (HR) perspective, grades still provide the easiest way to shortlist candidates.

He also explained how the bank is using a new "virtual recruiter", a chatbot called Jobs Intelligence Maestro (Jim), which he said has changed the way the bank shortlists applicants.

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 Chng brought up a scholarship candidate who did not get a perfect score, but during his 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.

NO SUBSTITUTE FOR VALUES

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?



SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE TAN XIN HAO

"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?"

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