

Universities here said they are committed to selecting students based on aptitude and not just grades. On having to conduct online interviews, SMU said it found that the applicants, "being Gen Z, are the true digital natives and hence... a lot more expressive and quite candid".  
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# Unis take admissions online, with focus on aptitude

Universities here have adapted well to the new medium to assess applicants' suitability for courses

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Singapore may be stepping into a recession and jobs hard to come by, but that has not stopped young Singaporeans from making a beeline for university.

The only difference is that all aspects of the admissions process have gone online.

A check with the six local universities found that they all had as many applications as last year for the estimated 17,000 university places planned for this year. As in previous years, more than 25,000 Singaporeans have applied, including A-level and polytechnic diploma holders.

The preferred courses of study also remain more or less unchanged.

As in recent years, computing and IT-related courses as well as data analytics are the hottest in terms of demand. The professional degrees, including medicine, law and accounting, continue to be popular as well.

The Singapore Institute of Technology, which offers allied health degrees in fields such as physiotherapy and nursing, said applications have grown by 9 per cent this year,

compared with last year.

"We believe that the pandemic has raised greater awareness of the importance of the work done by medical professionals and has inspired more people to join the healthcare sector to make a difference, and save lives," said Mr Kelly Koh, the university's director of admissions.

Singapore Management University (SMU) said its business management, accountancy and law degrees all continue to be popular, but noted that its computer science degree is 17 times oversubscribed.

Universities said that despite all aspects of admissions going online – including open houses, interviews, portfolio assessments and aptitude tests – they are committed to selecting students based on aptitude and not just grades.

**All the universities last week announced that they will consider applications from Singaporeans who were planning to study overseas but who may now prefer to study locally because of disruptions caused by the pandemic.**

Professor Bernard Tan, senior vice-provost (undergraduate education) at NUS, said: "While the method of assessment might have changed, it has not dented our commitment to identify students via aptitude-based admissions. In fact, the number of applicants considered under aptitude-based admissions has increased by more than 23 per cent this year."

NTU's deputy president and provost Ling San said that last year, one-third of NTU's freshmen won places based on more than just their grades. This year, the proportion is likely to go up further as the university has pledged that in a few years, up to half of the student body will be selected through aptitude-based admissions.

All six universities said they have already started sending out offers of places since late last month. The bulk of the offers will go out this month and some early next month.

All the universities last week announced that they will consider applications from Singaporeans who were planning to study overseas but who may now prefer to study locally because of disruptions caused by the pandemic.

They have to write directly to the universities by May 17.

Students who are midway through their studies at overseas universities, and unable to continue with them, can sign up for modular courses offered by the local universities or enrol for a semester.

SMU's director of admissions strategy and outreach Linette Lim said: "We started off a little hesitant, wondering if online interviews will be as good as the face-to-face individual and group interviews that we are known for."

"To our surprise, the applicants, being Gen Z, are the true digital natives and hence very comfortable. They are a lot more expressive and quite candid. It has actually gone so well that we are thinking of how we can use the online medium, including the social platforms, more to give out information and conduct admissions."

Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and National University of Singapore (NUS), which together take in more than 13,000 students a year, said that despite online appraisals, they are committed to moving away from just using grades to admit students.

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