

Benefits And Drawbacks Of The Early Admission Scheme

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When it comes to the question of why so many of us are working so hard preparing for the public exams, it is conceivable that most students are unanimous in their answer—they want to be admitted to the universities. In the past, there was no other way to achieve the goal, except to sit for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination. The situation has, however, changed recently, with universities admitting secondary six students on the basis of their outstanding Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination results. How far can the secondary schools and students benefit from this Early Admission Scheme?

The secondary schools with students being admitted to university through this scheme are deemed to be the greatest beneficiaries of the scheme. In fact, secondary schools these days are constantly beset by two major problems, namely the alarmingly low birth rate and the risk of being changed from EMI to CMI schools, both of which can be eased, if not solved, by the Early Admission Scheme. In the first place, the rapidly declining birth rate in Hong Kong has already coerced hundreds of thousands of kindergarden and primary schools into closing down. Such a threat is now looming large among the secondary schools. If a secondary school has several students being admitted through the scheme, surely it will gain a higher reputation, assuring parents of its quality education provision. Admitting enough students for the survival of the school is thus not an arduous task. Moreover, as enrolment of more students of high caliber is more probable, the school can easily obtain good results in the public examinations. Under such circumstances, the school will not run the risk of being converted into a CMI school.

While the EAS is warmly welcomed by most secondary schools, such a view is probably not shared by the secondary seven students, the majority of whom regard the scheme as biased in favor of academic elite. From the S.7 students' point of view, it is utterly unfair for those S.6 students to enter universities while bypassing the HKALE, which is a general standard of assessment for all S.7 students. After undergoing the arduous process of preparing for the AL Exams, one can say for sure that the AL Exams are far more difficult and demanding than HKCEE. Those who have done well in

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HKCEE may not have similar results in HKALE. “Why should I put so much effort while the others can enter the universities without meeting the normal requirement?”

Apart from creating a sense of injustice, the scheme is further criticized for a more practical reason: it reduces the S.7 students’ chance of being admitted to the universities. In a knowledge-based society like Hong Kong, the possession of a university degree is of the essence in obtaining a high-paid job. Thus, though the number of universities has already increased to a maximum of six, there is still cutthroat competition for a place in universities, let alone those with a high reputation. Now that an increasing number of S.6 students are admitted through the EAS to the universities, while the number of university degrees remains constant, it is inevitable for some students who may originally be given a place, to lose their chance. As a result, these students cannot but put up with a diploma or associate degree.

Last but not least, the impact upon S.6 students being admitted through the scheme should not be neglected, since they are actually directly involved in the scheme. To them, the scheme should be a mixed blessing. On one hand, they get the precious chance to be admitted a year earlier than the others, escaping the exhausting AL exam, and won’t run the risk of getting low scores because of any mishaps. On the other hand, they are subject to the pressure of their parents, who have great expectations for their future.

As a Form 7 student, of course I am not happy with this scheme, for it reduces my chance of being admitted to the universities. But to be objective, every scheme has its imperfections. It seems that this scheme harms no one except a few unfortunate Form 7 students. After all, once you choose to be a student in Hong Kong, you have no other choice but to put up with the elite-oriented system.

Teacher's Feedback : Very sound and comprehensive arguments on this hot issue. (Miss Lai Ming Lee)

Food For Thought : Can you think of a better scheme to replace the Early Admission Scheme?

