A fairer policy for students

The Government is offering bursaries and scholarships to enable top scorers at SPM and pre-university level to gain entry into local and overseas institutions of higher learning.

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AFTER much speculation over the status of Public Service Department (PSD) scholarships this year, details of the awards were made clear this week.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin issued a statement on Tuesday outlining the nature of scholarships offered by both the PSD and the Education Ministry.

Muhyiddin, who is also Education Minister, explained the criteria and selection process for the the scholarships.

“The Government will spend a sum of RM2.12bil this year to pay the cost of students’ tertiary education in local and foreign universities,” he added.

In June 2011, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced the Government would review the PSD scholarship scheme and reward students who achieved excellent results in their pre-university courses instead of the SPM.

Najib added that the new policy would be as fair and balanced as possible in its allocation of PSD scholarships.

According to Muhyiddin, the top 50 students in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) 2011 based on the ministry’s list will be offered the National Scholarships Programme for tertiary study at the top universities in the world, and is based on the Education Ministry’s list.

On academic merit

Selection for the National Scholarships Programme is purely based on academic merit, and recipients will pursue their foundation and undergraduate studies for the fields of their choice in local and foreign universities.

This sponsorship of the creme de la creme of SPM top scorers was first mooted by Najib in mid-2009, and subsequently a new grading system for the SPM was introduced in the same year.

As such, students are now graded according to A+, A-, A, B+, B, C+, C, D, E and G compared with the previous standards where the grades were from 1A to 9G.

Then Education director-general Tan Sri Alimuddin Mohd Dom explained that the change would provide a more detailed breakdown of excellent students.

The inaugural batch of National Scholarships was given to 30 of the country’s top performing students in 2010, followed by another 30 recipients in 2011.

However, the major change in the scholarship scheme this year is the introduction of the Education Ministry’s bursaries for pre-university studies; these will be automatically offered to all 1,609 students who earned 9A+ and above in the SPM 2011 regardless of ethnicity, race and background.

The bursaries will cover costs for either the Sijil Tinggi Persekolan Malaysia (STPM), matriculation studies, the International Baccalaureate (IB), A-levels, or other foundation courses provided by the Higher Education Ministry.

Students can check details of the bursaries and update their student status on the Education Ministry’s bursaries for pre-university studies.

Selection for these criteria vary according to the universities in the world as determined by the ministry.

The approved foreign institutions for these courses include the University of Oxford and Imperial College London in the United Kingdom (UK) and Harvard University in the United States (US).

For other fields of study, students must have unconditional offers of admission for recognised courses from any of the top 50 universities in the world as determined by the ministry - in this regard, the approved “top 50” universities varies according to the fields of study.

Four categories

Selection for the 2014 PILN is divided into four categories; scholastic ability (20%); ethnic composition (60%); Sabah and Sarawak bumiputra (10%); and the socially disadvantaged (10%).

Students’ co-curricular participation, socio-economic backgrounds, and interviews will be taken into account alongside their academic ability - the weightage for these criteria vary according to the four categories outlined above.

For example, in the scholastic ability category, students’ academic achievements will make up 80% of their selection criteria.

However for those in the socially-disadvantaged category, only 60% weightage has been given to students’ academic performance.

Scholarship candidates will also be assessed by the Student Assessment Centre (SAC) during their interviews, to determine their interests as well as skills such as leadership, creativity and confidence.

The assessment panel comprises Government officials of various races, professions and job grades.

For 2012, the PSD is offering scholarships for 300 SPM leavers under the “Special Japan, Korea, France and Germany Programme”, which enable students to take up engineering courses in the four countries.
Candidates must possess a minimum of 9A’s in the SPM, and will be required to undergo language classes as well as local pre-university courses.

Selection for this programme is divided into four categories: scholastic ability (20%); ethnic composition (60%); Sabah and Sarawak bumiputra (10%); and the socially disadvantaged (10%) - students’ co-curricular participation, socio-economic backgrounds, interviews and SAC assessments will also be taken into account.

Students need to apply for this programme by logging on the PSD’s website at www.jpa.gov.my.

Meanwhile, students who have completed their pre-university studies this year are also eligible for 10,300 Local Degree Programme Scholarships (PIDN) provided by the PSD for local undergraduate study.

To qualify, students must have a minimum CGPA of 3.5 or its equivalent in their pre-university studies, and have been offered entry in recognised courses at approved local tertiary institutions.

This includes all public tertiary institutions (except Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris), private universities categorised as government-linked companies such as Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Multimedia University and Universiti Tenaga Nasional.

Students may also enrol in courses at local branch campuses of foreign universities such as the University of Nottingham, Monash University, Curtin University of Technology and Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia.

Other private universities recognised for the PIDN include AIMST University, UniKL-Royal College of Medicine Perak, UCST University, Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences, International Medical University and Perdana University.

Muhayiddin’s full statement on the scholarships, including lists of foreign universities approved for the PILN, is available at www.moe.gov.my.