

# Value of 'A' waning

I CAN understand Prof Dr Living Lee Chai Peng's desire to encourage our young people to study as many different subjects as possible, and his frustration with certain parties who think those who obtained distinctions in the SPM examinations are "muggers and bookworms", "Don't stop them from trying" (*The Star*, March 29).

However, I am afraid I do not share his faith in the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate's ability to differentiate a genuine A student from that of a pseudo-A student.

As a teacher who has taught Form Five classes for more

than two decades, I would like to enlighten Prof Lee about this phenomenon called "grade inflation".

This phenomenon is not peculiar to Malaysia.

I came across an article on the BBC website about top universities in Britain having a tough time selecting students for enrolment because too many applicants have obtained too many distinctions.

I understand they are now trying to overcome this problem by having two types of distinctions i.e. "A plus" for the excellent students and just "A".

I am sure in many schools, students have to score at least

75 marks to get A1. In my school, the standards are even higher. Students have to get 80 or more marks to qualify for A1. What is the benchmark set by the Malaysian Examinations Syndicate?

But when the number of distinctions obtained by SPM candidates is doubled or even tripled compared to what has been obtained during the school trial examination (an annual occurrence), can you blame the public for being sceptical about the quality of "excellent" students?

I feel sorry for those who truly deserve the distinctions.

Prof Lee also wrote: "I chal-

lenge them (the sceptics) to show me one such person who is stupid and still got all As."

But nobody is saying anything about anybody being stupid. Of course, to get an A, you can't be stupid. You just have to be slightly above average.

It is an open secret: you don't have to be brilliant to get a distinction these days.

In fact, as a teacher, I have seen standards dropping over the years, but in the last few years, the deterioration seems to have escalated at an alarming pace.

Similarly, candidates who do not deserve to pass have miraculously sailed through

their public examinations.

Prof Lee also wrote: "Let us reward those who succeed." I absolutely agree.

But first let us make sure that those we reward are really the ones who deserve to be rewarded. Let an A be a real A.

The Public Services Department would have a much easier time selecting the genuine scholars to award scholarships to. It does not matter how many subjects a candidate takes, but please don't lump the wheat and chaff together.

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