

# Raise the bar, get the best

I DO not know whether Victor Chew ("Improvements take time", NST, Feb 2) is in the teaching profession.

But on the subject of English proficiency of PMR candidates, I would like to inform him that I have been an English teacher since 1975 and I am still teaching in a secondary school.

Over the years, but especially in the last 10, I have seen a decline in English not only among students but also among English teachers and lecturers.

I believe that teacher-trainers should be excellent teachers (with a good command of the language and good teaching techniques) before they are recruited as lecturers at college or university level.

Unfortunately, not all lecturers are up to the mark. I have read articles by university lecturers that are littered with grammatical mistakes. For far too long, members of the public have written to the



**REGISTERING NEW TEACHERS:** Selection for training must be more stringent.

Press to complain about the mistakes made by English teachers in the classroom.

Lest I be misunderstood, I must state that I write not to poke fun at my less proficient colleagues but to lament the

lack of quality control when recruiting English teachers and teacher-trainers.

The Public Service Department should focus on setting higher standards of recruitment instead of designing

so-called competence tests for teachers who have already been certified to teach.

Chew raised a very interesting point when he said that the best candidates do not wish to be teachers.

This may be true in recent years, but not some 20 or 30 years ago. I was the top Arts student in my school in the late 1960s and I accepted a teaching scholarship to further my studies in university in the 70s.

I have many colleagues in the teaching profession who were also top scorers. However, I must confess, I have discouraged many young people from joining the teaching profession because it is no longer what it used to be.

Previously, although the pay wasn't attractive, my colleagues and I enjoyed a five-day week, less paperwork, less non-teaching duties, etc.

Indeed, the biggest challenge facing the Education Ministry is making the teach-

ing profession attractive so that it will be the first career option for top scorers.

The ministry should set a time-frame to improve the terms and conditions of service in the teaching profession because we cannot afford not to do anything about them.

Changes must benefit the majority, not a handful like the "super teachers". Vast differences in pay for teachers performing more-or-less similar duties might result in resentment and cronyism.

We cannot recruit mediocre candidates as teachers and expect them to produce excellent scholars. No amount of training will transform them into excellent teachers.

A teacher who doesn't have good English proficiency will, after attending a course, just teach Manglish more efficiently. So why not recruit the right candidate from the start?

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