

NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY POLICY

Singapore



Policy Frameworks

Does equity with regard to supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education feature in any government produced policy documents? If so, which government policy document(s) are these and can you provide website link(s) to them?

The Compulsory Education Act (Chapter 51) states that all Singaporean children of compulsory education age (6 – 15 years old) must attend and finish primary school education. This means that all Singaporean children regardless of race, language, religion or socioeconomic status must receive at least primary school education up to that age.

For the Compulsory Education Act (Chapter 51), please refer to <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/CEA2000>.

However, the following exemptions apply:

- The student is granted approval to be home-schooled.
- The student attends a designated school.
- The student is deemed unsuitable to attend any national primary school due to any physical, intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Children must undergo an application process to be admitted for any of these educational options. For more information, visit <https://www.moe.gov.sg/primary/compulsory-education/exemptions>.

Other governmental programmes have been launched which are meant to ensure the support of disadvantaged students in Singapore to be able to complete Primary, Secondary, Pre-University, Tertiary (Higher Education) and Vocational education, which are described in subsequent sections of this report.

What policies and actions are described in these government policy documents in terms of supporting students from low-income or marginalized populations to enter or succeed in higher education?

Students from low-income families

1. Children from low-income families can apply for assistance via the Ministry of Education (MOE) Financial Assistance Scheme, which can cover school fees.
2. Children with special educational needs (SEN) can be covered under the SPED Financial Assistance Scheme.

For more information, visit <https://www.moe.gov.sg/financial-matters/financial-assistance>.

Students with disabilities

1. Around 20% of students with SEN attend special education (SPED) schools, while the other 80% are included in mainstream education. In 2019 the Ministry of Education introduced two intervention programmes, Circle of Friends (CoF) and Facing Your Fears (FYF) to equip classmates of students with SEN with tips on providing social, emotional and academic support to their peers.
2. The Ministry of Education has also announced the increasing of funding for SPED schools of up to 40% to better support their capacities in providing education for students with disabilities and SEN. This coincides with the reduction of school fees of up to 25% for SPED schools charging fees on the higher end of the spectrum.

For more information, please refer to <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/20191108-ensuring-access-to-quality-and-affordable-education-strengthening-support-for-students-with-special-educational-needs>.

Learners from alternative educational backgrounds

SkillsFuture is a governmental initiative to provide reskilling and upskilling opportunities as part of their lifelong learning programme for Singaporeans. This includes the Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) framework which provides certified and accredited training for individuals looking for tradeswork and job-specific skills training. There is active work in making more certification levels and subjects articulatable with tertiary educational opportunities in Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs), Polytechnics and Universities especially in the form of advanced standing and credit exemptions.

Also as part of SkillsFuture, every qualifying Singaporean is given a number of Credits which they can redeem as offsets to courses conducted under the SkillsFuture programmes.

For more information, visit <https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg/AboutSkillsFuture>.

Is there a standalone policy document dedicated to equity promotion in higher education? If so, which document(s) is/are these? Can you provide a link(s)?

The Singapore Government does not rely upon a single document for equity promotion in higher education. The government identifies areas and groups of concern and focus, and plans and executes programmes and initiatives targeting these areas and groups, especially in conjunction with schools and tertiary educational institutions.

Which equity target groups are identified in the policy documents? (Please choose as many groups as apply in your own country)

- ➔ Low-income or lower socio-economic background students
- ➔ Older or mature learners
- ➔ Students with disability

Does the country have concrete targets for the participation of specific equity groups in higher education?

Singapore's educational system is a merit-based system. Singapore's equitable policies are designed to assist students from all groups, including targeted disadvantaged groups, supporting them in their journeys through the educational system.

Achieving Policy Targets

Are there any non-monetary instruments such as outreach work between schools and universities, reforms to university admission etc. used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

Holistic Pathways for Higher Education

1. The three largest publicly-funded Autonomous Universities in Singapore have a Discretionary Admissions scheme, allowing up to 15% of every freshman cohort to be admitted based on a holistic evaluation of their achievements in cocurricular activities and other areas even if they may not meet specific academic requirements.

2. The MOE is expanding the aptitude-based admissions system to cover more majors offered in university, as well as expanding universities centred around aptitude-based admissions. Aptitude-based admissions allow for students in some areas to be admitted based on an evaluation of their past work and competencies in specific skills not necessarily covered in previous levels of education.

For more information, please refer to <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/20200130-enhancing-pathways-in-the-higher-education-landscape-to-support-diverse-interests-and-aptitudes>.

Are there any financial instruments such as bursaries, scholarships and loans used to promote access/success for students from specific equity groups in higher education? If so, can you describe what they are?

The following financial instruments are used:

1. MOE Higher Education Bursary, to provide financial assistance to students from lower-income families (<https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/20191217-enhancing-the-affordability-of-higher-education>),
2. Various scholarships targeting students with disabilities, such as the APB Foundation Scholarship (<https://www.spd.org.sg/scholarships/>)
3. The MOE Tuition and Study Loans, which provide students from lower-income families flexible loan tenures on their university tuition fees (<https://www.moe.gov.sg/financial-matters/government-loan-schemes>).

Sources

The information was provided by the Ministry of Education of Singapore as of 13 December 2021.



Co-produced by

This country brief is the result of the joint effort of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), a division of London Higher.

