

Citizenship criteria: How much to disclose?

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The assurance is that those given the red passport will be assessed on their allegiance to Singapore. Some are wondering, though, as the Government plans to approach a number of permanent residents to sink roots here, if the citizenship criteria can be clearer.

PRs know only that they are eligible to apply, if they are at least 21 and have been a PR for at least “two to six years prior to the date of application”, through two citizenship routes: Economic merits and family ties, according to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority’s (ICA) website.

Last year, the criteria was tightened, with the only detail given that the ability to integrate was an important consideration.

Some countries such as Australia have a clear points system and Institute of Policy Studies research fellow Leong Chan Hoong is one for a more transparent criteria and process, so that applicants know what they are “getting into rather than just filling in forms”.

Said Dr Leong: “The system has to be one that Singaporeans feel is legitimate and assures them about who is being admitted to Singapore and the skills they bring.”

While the ICA has said before that it does not disclose publicly the exact criteria to prevent abuse of information, the National Population Secretariat has said previously that language, culture and contributions to society are broad citizenship considerations.

Those whom MediaCorp spoke to suggested clear indicators in the areas such as education, number of years as a PR, special skills or contribution to Singapore, a salary not less than the median wage and children who have served National Service or have become Singaporeans.

Said Sembawang GRC MP Lim Wee Kiak: “We want to attract bright talent, so the criteria could be a diploma or degree without going into which class or where it’s from.”

But limiting citizenship to diploma and degree holders could mean missing out on talented people without academic qualifications, for instance, hairdresser David Gan or a three-star Michelin chef, said Marine Parade GRC MP Lim Biow Chuan.

More than just defining the criteria, the challenge is to disclose criteria that is both broad and informative for the public, said observers.

Listing such details could subject the Government to “litigation through a judiciary review”, said Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan.

“If you give A citizenship but not B, and B finds out, B could challenge the Government in court, demand an explanation,” Assistant Professor Tan said.

While ICA may have a set of indicators, “the authorities would want to have the discretion on who they give citizenship and this is the same with other countries”, he added.

IT consultant Manikandan Renganathan, 38, who has lived here for 14 years before becoming a citizen this year, agreed.

“Once you reveal it, more people will try to meet what’s required of them. Do you take all these people in?” he said.

The flipside is that “those who are rejected won’t know how to improve their chances in a couple of years’ time and they could relocate to other countries pre-emptively”, said Asst Prof Tan.

Dr Lim Wee Kiak told MediaCorp, though, that from his experience in dealing with rejected applicants who turn up during his Meet-the-People sessions, the ICA does give “hints”.

“If the written reply says the applicant is advised to re-apply in six months’ time, it means the applicant is not ready yet, or if further upgrading is advised, the applicant needs to improve his skill or education level.”