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SUBJECT: In jail, but he scores 5 distinctions

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LIKE many other O-level students, Sean (not his real name) used his free time to revise and discuss his school work with friends from a study group.

However, he and his friends are not regular secondary students but inmates at the prison school at Kaki Bukit Centre.

The 27-year-old's hard work paid off yesterday when he was named one of the top two inmates who sat for the O levels last year. He scored five distinctions in English, Combined Humanities, Combined Science, Elementary Mathematics and Principles of Accounts.

This year, 78 per cent or 99 out of 127 candidates who registered for the O levels while in prison did well enough to qualify for tertiary education. This is a 5 per cent improvement from last year's figure.

Out of the 97 candidates who sat for the exams while in prison, 83.5 per cent scored three or more O-level passes, a 4.5 per cent drop from last year's figure.

Sean, who was sent to prison in 2006 on drug-related charges, said he was motivated to study when he saw how many inmates in their 50s and 60s kept returning to jail and could not hold stable jobs.

"I saw their predicament and...I did not want to be like them. If I had no qualifications, I would not be able to get a good job to support myself and my family."

Sean dropped out of school when he was a Secondary 3 student at Bukit View Secondary. He worked as a floor supervisor at a nightclub before he was jailed.

He will complete his sentence in July and will apply for a course in hospitality at Temasek Polytechnic. In the future, he wants to work in a hotel.

"Many inmates might want to give up because life is very strict in prison. I want to tell them to persevere. Learning how to be disciplined will be good for them."

AMELIA TAN