

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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EMPLOYMENT

We need policies that deliver jobs

IT is heartening to note that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is giving a lot of attention to issues challenging young Malaysians.

The country has a large young population and their issues are central to government policy. Young people today have wide-ranging views and their positive perception is linked to government effectiveness in resolving issues.

Their greatest concern is jobs. The government has to study, analyse and re-evaluate whether youth-driven strategies on job creation, particularly for young graduates, have met the national key performance indicator in line with the prime minister's National Key Economic Area strategies.

While efforts have been made to deal with problems of youth unemployment, these have to focus beyond conventional priorities.

The private sector also needs to be more proactive to improve the job market. It has to be innovative to promote employment.

Here are the key concerns confronting fresh graduates and job creation: the reality and challenges.

YOUNG people now want a job that is commensurate with their qualifications, skills and competency. It is important that these jobs can keep up with the current living standard.

THOUSANDS of fresh graduates are looking for decent jobs in the market. But sadly, many remain unemployed.

Obviously, we have to look at the process of producing graduates. One of the main complaints is that graduates are not up to the standard required by employers, particularly in the private sector, including government-linked companies.

They have a poor command of English. While this may be a reason, there are other more urgent points that the government must address, recognise and tackle.

Even though the unemployment rate is relatively low, about three per cent compared with other countries, our economy must be deep enough to absorb a diversified and skilled workforce.

Job specifications either become too narrow or too broad technically which fresh graduates might not be able to match.

This growing mismatch has been present all the time. The situation is worsened by the changing job structures and competency and skills-to-job alignment because of technological and market shifts.

Employment may not be rising

in tandem with investments dictated by Entry Point Projects.

The government needs to know the trend in technology and market gap regarding job creation in a mature markets as opposed to new sectors of growth. It must be able to distinguish where further work on policy modification and intervention is needed to impact on job creation.

Ministries or agencies must undertake an audit of critical sectors responsible for attracting investment and employment creation. These sectors include information technology, banking and financial, oil and gas, power and amenities, entertainment, infrastructure and construction, and engineering.

These priority sectors benefited from the government's stimulus package but their success must be gauged by the creation of jobs.

Institutional contribution and the effectiveness of generating new jobs must be part of the KPI. It is pointless if new investment adds more wealth in a few hands and results only in a marginal few being employed.

This is one reason the income inequality gap widens over time. GLCs like Tenaga Nasional Berhad, Telekom Malaysia, Sime Darby, UMW, Petronas, and listed government entities, such as Felda and Lembaga Angkatan Tentera holding companies, serve as important sources for creating jobs.

It is important to draw lessons from their experience in terms of employment capacity building and actual number of jobs created arising from their business restructuring or joint ventures.

TNB and Petronas not only employ many engineering-related professionals, but they also produce accounting, finance, and IT graduates through their respective universities.

These institutions create a pool of professionals. Through their own foundations, these bodies sponsor their graduates with an understanding that upon graduation, they are absorbed by the companies. The same is true for Felda and Lembaga Angkatan Tentera-related companies — jobs are reserved for their sponsored students.

However, this is not the case for self-financed fresh graduates. They are the ones that have to look far and wide to seek employment. Those graduates who do well will find their way abroad.

I urge the Public Service Department to re-look the status of sponsored students, particularly those pursuing non-critical courses.



Fresh graduates are concerned about their future in an increasingly tough job market.

es. I am referring to students who achieved high credit point grade averages. These graduates are legally bound by PSD, yet many are told the government is not ready to employ them.

They are required to report to PSD and the Public Services Commission (PSC) after graduation. Despite not being able to recruit them, PSD is unwilling to release these graduates.

PSD should facilitate its sponsored students, both local and abroad, to land jobs.

A high value-added economy cannot be realised and sustained without the contribution of this talent pool of young graduates.

Where do those new skilled graduates in engineering, architecture, IT, law, economics, business and study fit into government jobs following the adoption of e-recruitment?

Graduates need to know what the government policy direction is in nurturing, building and retaining new talent pools for the future.

Under the current e-recruitment system, registered fresh graduates have a long wait for a job offer.

Perhaps, the PSC and PSD will have to reinvent their traditional roles in the light of the Blue Ocean strategy in so far as it affects sponsorship, job recruitment, placements and retention of graduates.

I recognise the contributions of the private sector in spurring growth. But as employers of young graduates, the private sector has to do more. The reality is many pri-

vate firms are not expanding to absorb fresh graduates. More often, they are more conscious about the bottom line.

In the case of bullish sectors, such as banking, oil and gas, infrastructure and construction, as they benefit from public investments, too, they should create more jobs.

Unfortunately, what happens in these sectors is that existing jobs only get redistributed and few new jobs are created.

Just look at the recruitment pages in the newspapers. Most jobs in the key sectors are for senior posts, requiring more than three to 10 years of experience. With mergers and acquisitions among large companies, jobs only get rationalised and again, benefiting only a few young graduates.

Another popular employment gimmick is e-recruitment, which allows graduates to register their profile and resume online. This can be an illusion because if one is to check, particularly the public sector with e-recruitment, you will find no jobs available. E-recruitment only complicates and creates a database. After six months, the data expires.

In fact, there is no recruitment taking place. Fresh graduates are given false hope.

Another important area is the course curriculum at public and private universities. This is to ensure that what is being taught and designed at the universities is aligned to the job market.

The goal is to establish a standard content regarding core subjects taught, choice of electives and specialisation in major fields. The options for non-core courses should be trimmed and structured so that students spend more time on strengthening core competency as well as English language proficiency.

The same goes with majors in engineering, economics and other technical subjects like robotics. Innovative degree programmes may be attractive, but graduates will find difficulty landing a job because these are niche subjects.

A good example is those with a degree in climate change, mechatronics, space engineering and deep-ocean engineering. These are specialised skills with only a few companies involved in them.

Real change must create an impact that benefits stakeholders. There is a need for major streamlining or re-engineering the system to maximise youth resources, particularly fresh graduates.

They should not be sidelined by the existing human capital policy and bad solving mechanism that stunts future productivity, innovation and creativity in the economy.

It is interesting to see how government has put the Blue Ocean strategy into practice in tackling those issues. We have TalentCorp Malaysia, e-recruitment drive, a task force on graduate employability, key GLCs with national goals, strong participation from private and local universities, proactive private sector and strong education infrastructure support.

These elements have to jive in a smart way to solve the issues facing fresh graduates.

The task force on graduate employability, with a RM200 million allocation, is a positive move. It should not be just a clearing house for graduate training placement in the private sector.

It has to also facilitate leadership and should benefit from the ministries and agencies responsible for building a database on job profiles, calibrating demand and supply of skills and types of industry, streamlining research information regarding supply of specialised skills through human resource mapping to fulfil the future demand of development strategy.

The underlying task here is about targeting on what delivers rather than on what feels good.

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