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Right fit in the workplace

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BASED on the results of the 2016 Graduate Tracking Survey conducted by the Higher Education Ministry, the employability rate for Malaysian graduates has increased to 77.2 per cent last year compared to 76.1 per cent in 2015.

However, in the JobStreet.com Employer Perception of Fresh Graduates survey, a significant 70 per cent of respondents (employers) expressed their dissatisfaction with them.

JobStreet.com regional communications head Simon Si said even though the country produces more than 200,000 fresh graduates annually, one in four remains unemployed after six months, and 31.4 per cent of fresh graduates with tertiary education are jobless.

The majority of unemployed fresh graduates are from public universities (51 per cent), followed by private universities (34 per cent), polytechnics (13 per cent) and community colleges (two per cent).

There are a few reasons for unemployment based on the survey.

Sixty-eight per cent of employers say students ask for unreasonable salary and benefits; graduates have a poor command of English (64 per cent), are choosy about the job or company (60 per cent), and have poor communication skills (60 per cent) and poor attitude (59 per cent).

UNREALISTIC SALARY?

Si said today's average starting salary for fresh graduates is RM2,000.

"Many industries are not prepared to pay higher, therefore the expectation gap. It all boils down to negotiation between the company and the candidate," he added.

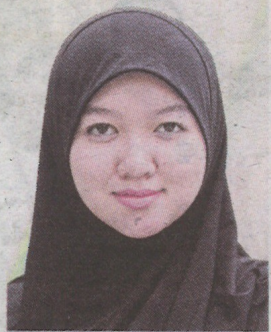
Final-year INTI International University & Colleges student Nur Azre Abd Aziz, 23, said: "The cost of living is increasing. Fresh graduates need higher starting salaries to pay for petrol, parking, rent, study loan and other expenses."

The International Business and Management student added: "It is important to do research on companies before applying for jobs. You then have an idea of the pay to ask for."

A. Emmanuel, 24, who is pursuing the Software Engineering and Digital Security programme at University of Wollongong @INTI International University & Colleges, said: "Adding value is key to employability because employers do not just look at academic qualification."

INTI International Business and Management student Natalia Bong Sue Yin, 19, said most fresh graduates demand a salary which does not match their experience, hence the unemployment.

Her twin sister, Natasha Bong Sue Yan, who is pursuing the same course, added that exposure to the workplace is crucial to clinching a job.



LEELHANI YUNESKA
ABD KARIM



DANESH RAJ
NAGARAJAN



(From left) Nur Azre Abd Aziz, Natalia Bong Sue Yin, A. Emmanuel and Natasha Bong Sue Yan discussing employability issues faced by fr

Some fresh graduates are not willing to start from scratch and carve a career.

They just want an easy pathway. University of Malaya (UM) Bachelor of Drama undergraduate Leelhani Yuneska Abd Karim, 20, said: "Do not just depend on internships."

"Look for part-time jobs and volunteering programmes during semester breaks," said Leelhani.

POOR COMMAND OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Nur Azre, who owns a start-up and has experience as a recruiter, said some students tend to overestimate their abilities in their resume.

"If your resume says you are what you are, the recruiter won't expect more," said Nur Azre.

"It is also important to have communication skills. For example, some software developers only speak in codes," said Si.

He added: "As most interviews in the private sector are in English, interviewees need proficiency in the language."

"Some fresh graduates, especially those from public universities, can't speak English," said Nur Azre, adding that they probably made friends with those who also spoke the same mother tongue on campus.

"They may feel they don't belong to a group which converses in English. That perception has to change if they want to improve their command of English."

While one may be more proficient in one's mother tongue compared to another language,

Emmanuel said the environment at home when one is young plays an important role.

"If you can't express yourself in English, how will you survive at the workplace or when abroad?"

"Language is not something you can learn overnight. You need a lot of time to master a language," he added.

SOFT SKILLS

As far as fresh graduates are concerned, 64 per cent of employers surveyed do not have any preference for graduates from public universities over those from private tertiary institutions.

But as employers have a big talent pool to choose from, fresh graduates with soft skills will stand out. Si said job seekers should look at the requirements of the post and consider whether they have a competitive edge.

"In addition to employers' demand for a high academic score (25 per cent), 39 per cent look for leadership skills — whether you have

been active in extracurricular activities and done volunteering work," he added.

Performing Arts (Dance) undergraduate at UM, Danesh Raj Nagarajan, 21, said universities can only help students build their soft skills to a certain extent as they should take the initiative to enhance the abilities.

But he lamented that employers sometimes set too high a standard. "We should not blame fresh graduates alone. Nobody is perfect," he added.

Leelhani Yuneska said: "Most students just



It all boils down to negotiation between the company and the candidate."

SIMON SI,
JobStreet.com regional communications head



A. EMMANUEL



fresh graduates.

want to make the dean's list but forget to look beyond that. Perhaps they are pressured by their parents, lecturers, peers and society at large."

Like Danesh, Leelhani Yuneska added that employers should give fresh graduates a chance to prove themselves.

She has been preparing herself for the workplace since she entered university. "I equip myself with soft skills at every opportunity to boost my resume."

She also takes the advice to "start small and listen to those who can guide you" close to heart.

Emmanuel added that students should take advantage of life on campus to develop confidence and build soft skills.

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES ON GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

- Intervention Programme/Industry Centre of Excellence (ICoE)
- Entrepreneur Programme
- CEO@Faculty Programme
- Integrated Cumulative Grade Point Average (iCGPA)
- 2u2i Programme

EMPLOYER PERCEPTION ON FRESH GRADUATES

Fresh Graduate Competitive Advantages

Factors that give fresh graduates an extra advantage

Has held a leadership position

39%

Has high academic scores

25%

Involved in extracurricular activities (clubs, sports, etc)

20%

Has done volunteer work

16%

Source: Jobstreet.com Employer Perception of Fresh Graduate survey

Understanding what's real

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FRESH graduates' salary expectations and what companies are willing to offer is usually a topic of contention. First-time job seekers are often frustrated with what they perceive as inadequate pay in relation to their qualifications as well as the state of the current cost of living. Would-be employers, on the other hand, cannot reconcile what they perceive as unrealistic salary demands with the lack of skills and experience.

Hence, knowing the average salaries in the job market is important to ease the matching and communication of job opportunities between job seekers and employers.

To help fresh graduates understand the job market better, online talent sourcing platform JobStreet.com recently launched its first comprehensive Salary Guide for Fresh Graduates.

JobStreet.com Regional Communications head Simon Si said the guide is designed to give an indication of the average salaries offered by companies based on job advertisements featured on JobStreet.com in 2015 and 2016.

"Right now there are some 20,000 jobs available, of which around 5,000 are fresh graduate jobs. And that is just on JobStreet.com — there are other job portals. We asked employers in our database whether they were going to increase their hiring in the third quarter of 2016 and 49 per cent said they were looking to hire while 39 per cent said there was no change in their hiring plans. Only 12 per cent will decrease their hiring — this is an indication there are jobs out there," he said.

To create the guide, JobStreet.Com retrieved data from job advertisements posted by employers — specifically jobs advertised for placements in northern, central and southern regions of Peninsular Malaysia

"When companies post fresh graduates positions on Jobstreet.com, they will have to say how much they are prepared to pay. For example, for one bank, it is RM2,500. We take the average from all the different banks who have posted with our portal and then get an average. So, if you look at our guide there is an average minimum and maximum salary for various positions across industries," said Si.

He added that the actual salaries for various positions vary based on factors such as market demand and supply, the academic grades and acquired skills of the candidates and the compensation and benefit policies of the hiring company.

"Ninety per cent of companies hiring are SMEs (small and medium enterprises). They don't have a fixed salary range. What happens then becomes demand and supply. Do SMEs pay less than big multinationals? Not necessarily because it all boils down to demand and supply. If an SME sector has trouble hiring IT (information technology) personnel because they are mainly working for major brands, then the salary of-



Companies are looking for ICT competency in the fresh graduates they hire.

INDUSTRIES POSTING THE MOST NUMBER OF JOBS IN 2016

- Manufacturing and Production
- Construction
- Banking and Finance
- Retail
- ICT

Source: JobStreet.com

ferred by the SME would start to climb up. Otherwise, they would not be able to compete — bearing in mind that IT is vital these days," Si explained.

In the drafting of the salary guide, Si said JobStreet.com also observed that employers in different regions are prepared to pay differently. For example, for an administrative or human resources position in the accounting/audit/tax services sector, the average minimum is RM1,267 and maximum is RM2,067 in the north, RM1,700 minimum and RM2,533 maximum in the central region, and RM1,233 minimum and RM2,000 in the south.

"If you are in the main market centre — the central or northern region, you will find salaries could be higher. Certainly in the central region where there are more businesses and bigger corporations, we imagine there are more opportunities. But there is a lot of development happening in the southern and northern regions that translate to opportunities, too. For the services industry, the central region would hold more opportunities," Si remarked.

On which industries are the top hirers today, Si said based on JobStreet.com's existing data, the top five would be manufacturing and production which has a drop of 7 per cent year on year (2016 over 2015), banking and finance which experienced a drop of 14 per cent, construction which dropped 10 per cent, retail with a four per cent drop, and ICT which experienced no change in terms of percentage.

What's interesting to note is that a lot of companies are looking for ICT competency in the fresh graduates that they hire, said Si.

"Businesses today must have a strong ICT platform. Digital technology has levelled the playing field. Companies are looking for employees in marketing, finance or HR, for example, who have an understanding of the digital world and global economy. Graduates must have a bigger perspective of the world and not be so sheltered. Critical thinking and adaptability is crucial. Companies trade throughout the world. Communications skills and understanding the cultures of the world is necessary," he said.



FRESH GRADUATE AVERAGE SALARY BY SPECIALISATION

Specialisation	Average Salary
Computer/IT	MYR 2,795
Building/Construction	MYR 2,616
Engineering	MYR 2,501
Sales/Marketing	MYR 2,458
Arts/Media/Communications	MYR 2,297
Accounting /Finance	MYR 2,230
Healthcare	MYR 2,219
Services	MYR 2,197
Sciences	MYR 2,162
Education	MYR 2,101
Manufacturing/Production Operations	MYR 2,008
Admin/HR	MYR 1,888
Hotel/Restaurant	MYR 1,820

Source: JobStreet.com statistics