

Fresh grads need digital skills

LETTERS: The two-year Covid-19 pandemic was a huge challenge to new graduates looking to start their careers as job opportunities were increasingly scarce with the economy and employment sectors struggling to recover.

New graduates must compete not only with their peers but also with those laid off as a result of the pandemic. The effects of the pandemic are also changing the global employment landscape.

Most industries and company managements are relying more on online communications — from management and administrative issues to business matters. Most have shifted to online transactions.

Many of the most recent applications and software have been developed to make it easier for people to deal with problems without requiring much physical movement.

If previously these skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal, were essential in getting a job, graduates now need to add digital skills in tackling challenges.

Graduates need additional tools to grab the opportunities available in the field of business, particularly those involved in online transactions. They must highlight the uniqueness of their field of expertise as a value-add to be hired.

Furthermore, graduates must take advantage of opportunities to supplement their knowledge with open sources via online training programmes.

According to Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad, in the Graduate Tracking Study for 2020 conducted by her ministry, the marketability rate of graduates in 2020 was 84.4 per cent, a slight decrease from 86.2 per cent in 2019.

According to the **Department of Statistics Malaysia's (DOSM)** 2019 graduate statistics, the graduate labour force participation rate fell by 0.1 per cent in 2019 from 83.6 to 83.5 per cent.

According to a study conducted by the Bumiputera Agenda Steering Unit (Teraju) and data from the DoSM Graduate Statistics 2020, the number of unemployed graduates increased by 22.5 per cent to 202,400 in 2020, up from 165,200 the previous year.

To address this, all parties must work together to increase the marketability of these graduates, especially in light of the pandemic.

Graduates must also improve their skills in the areas of digitisation and gig economy, which necessitates more creative graduates who can use technology to address today's challenges.

Direct government intervention is also required, without which it will undermine long-term efforts to improve economic competitiveness.

To address it, a few policy recommendations have been made, including increasing marketability of graduates produced by local universities and allowing the government to act as a temporary employer for unemployed graduates.

Also, allow them to be trained and enhance their skills in sustainable fields, and public-private sector collaborations are required to ensure that workers are paid a wage commensurating with the cost of living.

Fresh graduates are the backbone of the country's development and major contributors to economic activity.

Without government intervention to address graduate unemployment, the great potential of this generation will be wasted.

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2022/03/781979/fresh-grads-need-digital-skills>