

COVID-19: How the Higher Education Ministry is helping desperate fresh graduates find jobs

PETALING JAYA, Aug 24 — It is one thing to study for years and graduate only to find how difficult it is to get a job.

But try doing it in a pandemic.

While there was some hope that the COVID-19 pandemic would not last for very long, that does not seem to be the case now.

The conditions are definitely not favourable for employment and among those who might find it tough to find employment are fresh graduates.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has stepped in by having various initiatives to help this group of Malaysians.

Among the long-term strategies is the ministry's Graduate Employability Strategic Plan slated to run from this year to 2025.

It is expected to be launched soon.

The Ministry's Planning and Research Division's Secretary Division, Dato' Shaharuddin Abu Sohoh said in an RTM interview recently that it would contain four strategies, 13 initiatives and 31 activities.

It will be the main guide for local institutions of higher learning (IHL) to ensure the employability of their graduates in order to be competitive and fulfil the needs of various industries.

"Among the focus points that we emphasise in this plan is the application of 21st century skills and using a Future Ready Curriculum that is in line with the needs of the industries," he said.;

"Twenty-first century skills are those that have been identified as important and necessary. Skills that every graduate who is entering the job market should have."

"These skills include technology literacy, information and communication, creativity and innovation and critical thinking."

He added that the Future Ready Curriculum was an organic-based and flexible curriculum that emphasises on transformative teaching and learning.

It will also enable alternative interpretations for students.

Getting jobs for graduates

The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) found that unemployment, especially among graduates, had increased by 0.4 per cent in 2020 compared to the previous year.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a negative impact to the economies of most countries. The closure or not being able to operate at full capacity because of the virus has caused the workforce to shrink,” said Shaharuddin.

“This situation has been challenging for graduates to find jobs as companies have started to freeze employment, shrinking the size of their businesses while some have had to shut down because of the pandemic.”

“It has been even more challenging for those who have just finished their studies as they don’t have work experience yet.”

He added that the employability rate for graduates in 2020 decreased by 1.8 per cent to 84.4 per cent (it was 86.2 per cent in 2019).

This percentage measures the capability of a fresh graduate to obtain a job within six months of completing his or her studies or to sign up for courses to upskill themselves.

“The higher the rate, the better the chances for fresh graduates in that year to obtain jobs or further their studies.”

He said employability of graduates was connected to economic performance and the job market, adding that the ministry, under the National Economic Recovery Plan (PENJANA) had carried out two programmes.

Both programmes — Career Advancement Programme and Professional Certification — were based on skills and upskilling training to increase the employability of graduates.

The main aims for the Career Advancement Programme are job matching and placement, entrepreneurial programme and gig economy (training to help participants generate income through gig economy or freelancing).

“We are targeting public and private education institutions graduates from the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 who are still unemployed.”

“The uniqueness of these programmes is that it promises job placements the moment they complete their training, but they need to fulfil the necessary criteria.”

He added that the ministry was always carrying out intervention programmes for graduate employability.

These programmes focused on students from public universities with lower CGPA and were designed to give additional skills to them.

They would also be offered employment by various industries upon completion, provided they fulfilled the criteria.

The ministry also had entrepreneurial programmes to encourage students to try out the field.

More than 68,000 students from higher institutions of learning had part-time businesses while still studying.

“Nearly 8,000 students continued their businesses after they finished their studies,” he added.

He said the ministry was always working together with industries and academia in the institutions.

“This is not only concentrated on having one-off programmes but looks into medium and long term initiatives such as reviewing modules, improving the curriculum and having a more industry-driven environment for students.”

Getting registered

To make registration easier, the ministry has developed the Graduates Reference Hub for Employment and Training (GREaT) together with Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation and the Companies Commission of Malaysia.

The portal is designed to help students and graduates from the years 2019, 2020 and 2021 obtain training to upskill themselves and information on jobs according to their qualifications and competency.

Among the new features in the portal is the ‘jobmatching’ module that matches the graduates with the needs of the company or industry.

He added that graduates do not need to apply for jobs like other existing employment portals as the information that will be used is the one stored by the ministry’s existing graduate tracking system.

“So the criteria needed by the company or industry will be matched with the data or information of the graduate that is with MOHE.”

“This portal will match the jobs by using multi-criteria filtering and ranking.”

He added that the industry could pick the graduate according to their criteria such as field of study and level of education, name or type of institutions of higher learning, CGPA, which state they lived in, MUET qualification, proficiency in languages and skills in information and communications technology.

“This module is not meant to compete with the other employment portals but serves to complement them,” he said.

He said data protection was assured adding that information shared by graduates with the industry was done with the agreement that it was used by a third party to gain employment, the companies using the information was to fill a job vacancy and their status would be checked by the Companies Commission of Malaysia.

The companies will then need to get the approval of the ministry’s technical data committee after they fulfilled the necessary requirements.

The ministry will also ensure that companies need to complete their job selection within a stipulated period of time.

Those interested in signing up for any of these programmes, can surf over to <https://great.mohe.gov.my/>.

These programmes are available for free.

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/life/2021/08/24/covid-19-how-the-higher-education-ministry-is-helping-desperate-fresh-gradu/1999994>