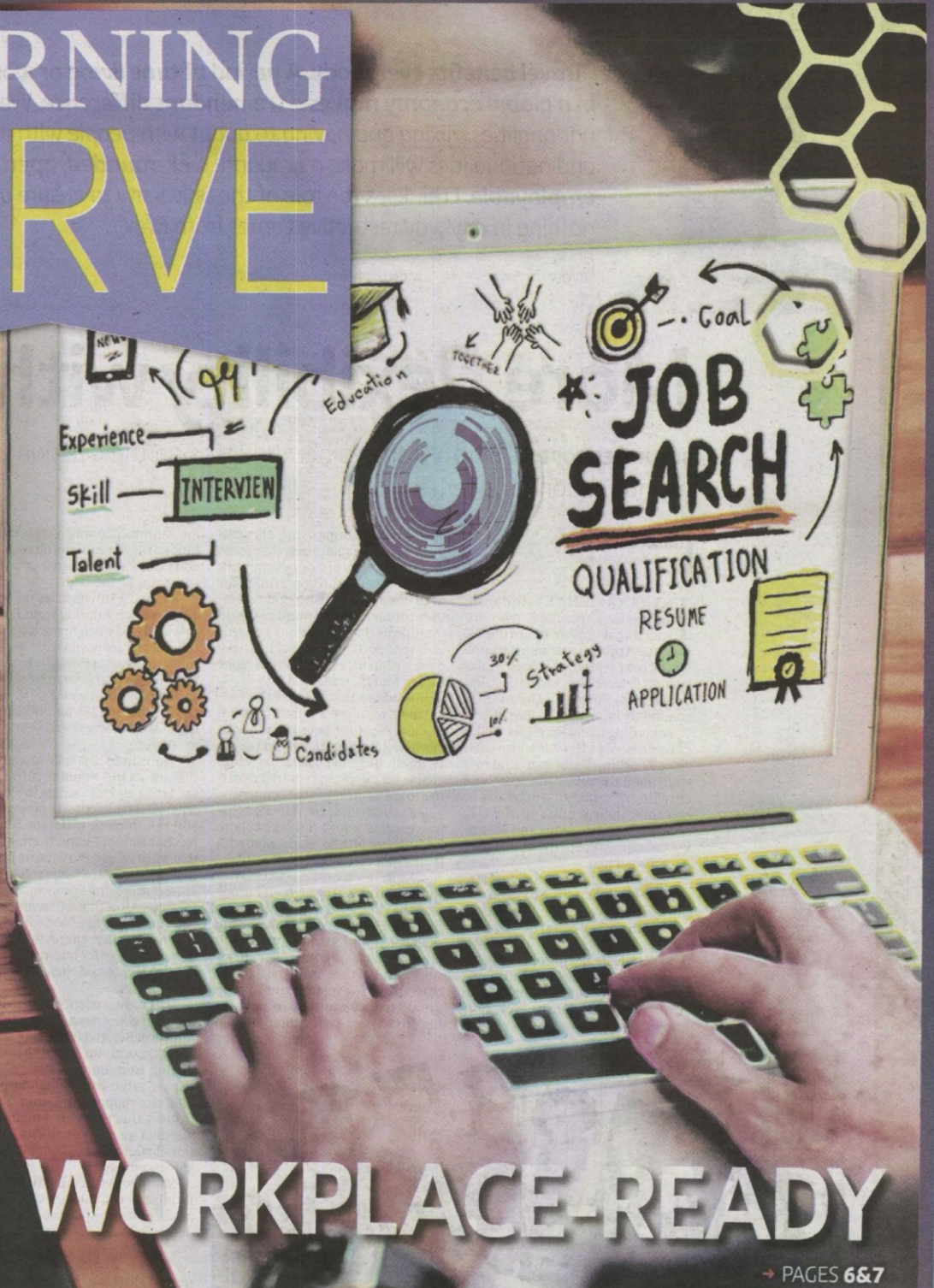


LEARNING CURVE



WORKPLACE-READY

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Kick-starting a career

TIPS: What graduates have to do to secure that dream job

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SOME 161,000 graduates or 8.8 per cent of youths, aged between 20 and 24 years old, have yet to find a job. They are among the 400,000 unemployed individuals last year, said the then Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Abdul Wahid Omar, who is now Pemodal Nasional chairman.

Despite the low unemployment rate, the government and private sectors have launched several programmes to boost employability such as Jobs Malaysia and IMalaysia Training Scheme.

And now, with the completion of final exams in many universities in the country, prospective graduates can begin the next phase of their lives — the working world.

Many tertiary institutions have their own career and alumni department that reaches out to fresh graduates to help them secure a job.

STARTING THE SEARCH

Sunway Education Group director of student services Lee Siok Ping said students need to prepare for their careers as early as the first year of university and not after they graduate.

By the time they graduate, they ought to have a rough idea of where they are heading.

"Graduates should 'know thyself' by reflecting on their values, strengths, weaknesses and interest. They should ask themselves questions such as 'What am I good at?', 'What do I enjoy doing?', 'What would I like to learn more about?', 'What motivates me?', 'What do I do easily that others find difficult?' and 'What do I want to achieve?'," said Lee.

"List the possible career options. Consider each option after pondering on the questions. Then research into the related job roles and companies. Graduates need to explore their opportunities by attending career fairs to learn more about prospects as well as get a chance to speak to the people in the industry.

"They can also hunt for jobs via a company's website and search for vacancies online.

"Leverage on a good network and recommendations, and seek advice from the career services department, talk to lecturers and seniors, seek family guidance and get views from experienced people in the field they are interested in.

"Students should also consider factors such as advancement opportunities, overseas postings, training and development, and the remuneration package."

Graduates, who took part in the Sunway Mentoring Programme, can seek guidance from their mentors regarding industry outlook and possible career opportunities.

Lee added that the important thing is to start somewhere. "Having done your research and weighed your options, courageously take that first step in your first job. Make the best of your work experience there, learn as much as you can, take the good and leave the bad.

"As you go along, you will soon discover if that is the profession for you. Give yourself a good two to three years to learn. Don't call it quits too easily. Sometimes it takes time to learn the ropes.

"Do not be fearful of making a decision and acting on it. Even if it is a wrong decision, you have moved ahead and grown wiser."

UCSI University student affairs and alumni deputy vice chancellor Associate Professor Dr Yeong Siew Wei said career preparedness of graduates is an essential function of any university in this age of technology where "industry relevant" and "competent graduates" are the buzzwords.

"With the university's Co-Operative Education Placement Programme (Co-Op) in place, we have forged strong links with more than 3,500 industry partners around the world to open doors for our students.

"All students, regardless of their field of study, undergo an internship at the end of each academic year to equip themselves with a strong grasp of fundamental workplace practices," said Yeong.

Bernice Ching Yuh Feng, who heads the Co-Op, said students attend various hands-on programmes before their internship.

"For example, we brief students on the job search platform; employ-

ers' requirements; curriculum vitae preparation; and how to get ready for the competitive job market. Throughout the year, we conduct a series of workshops, public talks, career management talks and competitions," said Ching.

"Our industry partners give career talks. So far this year, we have collaborated in more than 20 career talks.

"We run programmes to help students gain more industry exposure as well as organise regular industrial visits that help them get first-hand information on actual working environments and a better understanding of the company, its operations, vacancies and the application mechanism," added Ching.

University graduates need to keep abreast of current developments in the job market, particularly their own fields.

"A realistic assessment of the job market and how they can contribute as a fresh graduate in the real world is important to find satisfaction and development in their careers," Yeong added.

"We keep our alumni engaged through our alumni portal (alumni.ucsiuniversity.edu.my) which features news updates and upcoming events in addition to career opportunities," she said.

Alumni members share their working experience with their juniors to help them better prepare for the workplace.

"UCSI also has a dedicated online job search portal for students, and this platform allows students to register and send their resume to the companies directly whenever there are job openings.

"Our students receive first-hand information on vacancies. This job portal also benefits employers as it enables them to target the right candidates."

Monash University Malaysia head of student experience Selwyn Ng said its students are well-supported by its career centre.

The centre is open to students in need of career advice, resume-writing and interview skills. It organises talks and workshops conducted by the industry and corporations such as Google, Unilever, Shell and Microsoft.

"This year, the annual Monash

Career and Internship Fair will be held this Tuesday and Wednesday, and the event will provide students with insights into more than 30 employers across Malaysia.

"Our students will have easy face-to-face access to the employers, drop off their resumes, and find out about current recruitment trends and internship opportunities.

"In some cases, they may attend on-the-spot interviews during the fair. On the Monash website, we provide students with tips and a quick guide on how to prepare for the fair and derive the best out of it," said Ng.

PROSPECTS IN THE WORKPLACE

According to the JobStreet.com Top 10 companies 2016 survey, which drew the participation of more than 7,900 respondents, oil and gas companies remain highly sought after by employees, securing the top two spots for yet another year.

Coming in first for two years consecutively is Malaysia's oil firm, Petronas, followed by Shell and Google.

Petronas Group human resource management senior vice-president Datuk Raiha Azni Abd Rahman, in a statement, said: "As a global energy player, Petronas believes in growing and developing our people as a critical priority of business in order to successfully operate in today's challenging business environment.

"As such we strive to cultivate a work culture that is strongly grounded on the company's shared values of

loyalty, integrity, professionalism and cohesiveness to attract, motivate and retain talent."

Maybank Group chief human capital officer Nora Abd Manaf said it believes in the employability of fresh graduates.

"Some people say fresh graduates are not easily employable but I beg to differ. Nobody is work-ready. They have to start somewhere," she added.

The group reaches out to the right candidates through its Go Ahead Challenge, which has received global recognition for its efforts to recruit the right talent. "The challenge has unearthed many good talents. We also look beyond academic qualifications. We want people who have confidence and are willing to learn."

BTI Consultants Asia Pacific managing director and vice-president Anthony Raja Devadoss said the current economic situation has had an impact on graduate employability.

"Early this year, more than 50 top employers in Malaysia participated in the Sector-Focused Career Fair Big Bang (TalentCorp career fair) to reach out to potential employees.

"Based on our analysis, companies continue to look for talented fresh graduates but they are more selective because they do have a larger pool of candidates.

"Fresh graduates have to be more proactive, innovative and quick in seizing the right opportunities," said Anthony.

BTI is a global consulting firm that specialises in board and execu-

tive search, talent management and leadership development.

Anthony added there are numerous entry-level jobs via management trainee programmes and in areas such as sales, business development, accounting/finance, healthcare as well as consultancy.

"It is important that fresh graduates always keep an open mind and are flexible when it comes to starting a career.

"Aside from technical competencies and good soft skills, employers value candidates who are willing to work outstation, do shift work and sign up for projects or work on a contractual basis," he added.

"While academic grades are important, job seekers with years of experience and have a good network can be equally sought after in job functions that relate to business development, sales and investment.

"Academic grades and internships are important for job seekers' first entry into the job market, while subsequent work experience and achievements are critical to experienced job seekers in their career advancement.

"The ability to demonstrate proactiveness, effective communication and being well-prepared and insightful are critical in helping job seekers to enter the interviewers' door."

This is the first of a four-part series on job hunting for graduates that includes tips on how to write a resume, prepare for a job interview and how to survive the first month on the job



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Lee Siok Ping,
Sunway Education Group
director of student services



Nora Abd Manaf



Anthony Raja Devadoss



Students consulting potential employers at the UCSI Career Fair.



Bernice Ching



Yeong Siew Wei



At the Monash University Malaysia Career Fairs, students get insight into more than 30 employers across the country.