

Upskill grads for employment

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Malaysia's youth unemployment rate, standing at 10.8 per cent, has significantly affected the prospects of many graduates entering the workforce. — STR / FAIZ ANUAR

LETTERS: Malaysia's youth unemployment rate, standing at 10.8 per cent, has significantly affected the prospects of many graduates entering the workforce.

One reason is that employers are increasingly finding graduates significantly under-skilled and lacking crucial competencies in emerging technologies and developing industries, which are gaining traction in the current market.

Investments in smart city infrastructure, integration of artificial intelligence technology in digital services and new information technological services in finance require digital know-how to manage these developments.

The issue, however, is the intense pace at which these developments are being facilitated, making it harder for graduates to be prepared with skills at the time of graduation.

Graduates are syllabus-bound during their time of study, subject to a curriculum that's seen to be outdated and requiring review and updates to catch up with the trends.

The implication of this factor is that this is affecting the graduates' employability.

To change this, institutional educational reforms must be efficient and be able to bridge the skills gap by upskilling the talent pipeline to keep up with labour market developments.

While it is important to improve the quality of education through curriculum changes that meet industry expectations, this is very much a long-term resolve.

What ought to be the focus are those completing their education at universities, as it will be these future graduates who will feel the full brunt of the skills gap should there be a lack of supporting measures to upskill.

Perhaps, what the government could consider is the subsidisation of micro-credentials for our students to access during their course of study, particularly those modules which equip the students with technical, in-demand digital skill sets.

Micro-credentials are certified mini-qualifications which are designed to expose individuals to new skills through a learning curriculum, typically fast-paced and in a short period of time.

The benefit that supporting accessible micro-credentials can have is multi-faceted.

It allows students who may have opted for out-of-date courses to tap into new areas of learning, it can help supplement the local curriculum with up-to-date knowledge, and it can refine and improve pre-existing student skills.

Central to this policy resolution is the question of accessibility.

Many graduates have been inadvertently disenfranchised due to the higher cost of living.

Many have to work part time to support their education.

The cost of undertaking a micro-credential course, therefore, could be perceived as a financial liability by students.

What makes this issue significantly worse is the lack of awareness of the benefits of micro-credentials, making it harder for students to go the extra mile to adopt the programme.

The government, therefore, could work towards a subsidisation programme which makes it free at universities for students to take these courses through sustainable financing.

This would require newfound efforts to phase in the introduction of micro-credential programmes.

To test the efficacy of this policy, relevant agencies should pilot these in select universities to gather data on the adoption access rate.

It is also important to financially incentivise key industry players to help coordinate these micro-credential programmes through their input and expertise.

This ensures that the supplemental education offered at universities is imbued with employer expectations, helping to boost graduate employability.

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