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# education

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**Graduate training schemes are the short-term solution to reducing unemployed graduates and creating new jobs until we find a better one.**

Stories by TAN EE LOO education@thestar.com.my

**O**R Lim Su Min, the thought of speaking in public was rather daunting.

Despite having successfully completed a software engineering degree and a diploma in Public Performance from the London College of Music, it did very little to boost her self-confidence.

"I am very low self-esteem, whether in terms of my abilities, studies or achievements. I dared not speak up if I was in a crowd," she says.

She also tended to get stage fright when asked to present her ideas, or even just to introduce herself to others at social events.

The wake-up call came when she realised that the most useful up her soft skills in order to compete with her peers to get a job following the recent global economic slowdown.

"The competition is even tougher for fresh graduates who do not have any professional work experience," she says.

As such, Su Min, 23, decided to sign up for a course and took part in the Cyberaya Graduate Attachment & Training (GAT) programme, an initiative to offer fresh and unemployed graduates training and internship opportunities.

After weeks of training, thanks to the programme, Su Min begins to feel more confident and positive about herself.

"I may not be the best speaker in my group, but I have improved tremendously by developing my confidence through the programme. This is certainly a major achievement that I am very happy and proud of," she says.

Su Min is an example of how such training programmes can help graduates who, for whatever reason, did not manage to acquire the necessary soft skills and practical experience that are essential to job hunting and career development during their varsity studies.

Offered by CyberView Sdn Bhd, the six-month programme provides successful applicants with an opportunity to undertake on-the-job training with participating companies of MNC status in Cyberaya.

Aimed at enhancing the employability of local graduates and reducing unemployment, the graduates will begin the programme with two weeks of training in soft skills and team building, followed by work attachment with the companies.

Under the programme, Su Min managed to secure a traineeship opportunity with Soft Servers Technologies Sdn Bhd where she provides support to the senior developers as an application developer, training, maintenance and so on.

Like other trainees, she receives an allowance of RM1,500 every month during the course of the programme. If she successfully completes the month programme, she will be given

## Whip grads into shape



A group of youngsters enjoying an interesting session which helps them think out of the box.

an additional RM1,300 as bonus.

"She has improved since the first day she joined us. Her reading skills are good and she could develop the software and assist in the troubleshooting daily work," says Su Min's company spokesman Mohdnuhan Mohdnuhan Singh.

When the idea of providing graduates with "extra" training was first mooted and since

years ago, it was meant to complement the curriculum they studied in university.

It has, however, evolved to a stage where young graduates for innovative training programmes and job placements that cost the Government a considerable amount of money is no longer an option but a necessity so that they can hone their soft skills and are less likely to end up jobless upon graduation.

Many blame the educational institutions for failing to produce "work-ready" graduates, while others say the graduates must be accountable for their own shortcomings.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who was then Deputy Prime Minister, said in March that about 60,000 graduates were unemployed or faced difficulties in getting jobs.

He said the Government would ensure that the skills and knowledge of the graduates would be enhanced through training programmes.

CyberView managing director, Datin Redza Kufly says the recent launch of the GAT programme is in line with the objectives in the stimulus package.

"The programme is a platform for graduates to discover and insert the requirements of the industry standards," she says.

She also says the programme is meant to reduce unemployment among graduates who may be costly, but it is viable and can benefit both the graduates and employers if implemented effectively.

Various manpower training programmes have since mushroomed all over the country, not only as a result of the pressing need to reduce unemployment, but also because of the high demand for highly skilled workers.

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**It is our ultimate aim that these graduates be 'absorbed' as permanent staff of the companies where they receive their training.**

REZZA

As far as work performance is concerned, he says the graduates will be evaluated by supervising officers at the workplace and the coordinator of the programme.

"This is how we identify their strengths and help them overcome their weaknesses," says Redza.

So how does the programme benefit the participating companies? Wehringer Dai Cohn Soh Bhd chief operating officer Huseini S. Thagajagan has this to say: "There are several reasons for participat-



Great programme participants paying close attention to trainer Kamalul Zaman Mohd Amin who explained the importance of planning for change.



Get a ticket to ride. Some graduates are getting on to a bus that would be ferrying them around Cyberaya for a hour recently. They were the participants of a manpower training and the one who start of the programme.

ing in the GAT programme. Firstly, we are in need of new talents. Since there is no cost involved for six months and with the current recession situation, the programme was in fact a blessing in disguise for us."

Heirs who perform well and show passion towards their work will be offered a job with the company, she adds.

Manpower concerns "it helps the SMEs flourish by providing them with manpower just at the same time, we can do our part in helping the nation to increase the number of skilled knowledge workers," he says.

Among other graduate training schemes are the Graduate Employment Attachment Scheme (GAP) programme, MNC Malaysia Undergraduate Skills Programme and Graduate Trainee Programme for fresh graduates.

The GAT programme is a co-operation of the Graduate Employment Enhancement Programme or GEEP, implemented by the Sarawak National Development and Curtin University of Technology, Sarawak Malaysia (Curtin Sarawak) a training programme has been set up to train project managers, engineers, technical supervisors and technicians of locally based companies or

with the level of soft skills of the graduates who are joining the workforce.

In his book *Meia Tahun? Employable: How Graduates Can Hit the Ground Running*, Dr Rajni says the major soft skills lacking in Malaysian graduates are planning and organising skills, communication skills, problem solving and decision-making skills, creativity, initiative and self-confidence.

Government agencies in Sarawak. Open to participants from both the public and private sectors at present, the Government's Manpower Training Requirement Programme for Sarawak (MTRP) was recently launched by Sarawak Minister of Renewable Resources and Energy, Datuk Nicholas Ling, in a bid to train 10,000 graduates in a three-day technical training at Curtin Sarawak.

According to the university's course coordinators, it is part of a series of encouraged manpower training programmes being carried out to develop the nation's capacity building, knowledge acquisition and skills development. He says the next two intakes are from Oct 29 to 31 and Nov 2 to 4.

"The number of workers to be trained by the end of the programme will be about 600 by 2011," he says.

Among the modules taught at Curtin Sarawak under the programme are process technology, applied process control, transportation engineering and environmental engineering.

All the modules are facilitated by experienced academics of the School of Engineering and Science, many of whom are PhD holders and active researchers in their respective fields.

On the other hand, Abdul Hadi Abdul Razak says the most interesting aspect of the Cyberaya GAT programme is the self-working opportunities.

"I learnt about different aspects of socialising and building on my experiences through the sharing sessions that we had and this has helped develop my interaction skills and increased my knowledge - the experience is priceless," he says.

An education graduate, who finished her studies in May, agrees that graduates should see in all "a win-win situation" when signing up for a place in the scheme.

"I understand that some participants get paid while they undergo on the job training. So why not take the chance to learn and earn at the same time?" she says.

She adds that most training programmes are designed for those graduates tied in a waiver of time to attend such training schemes, and that they are for those who are "less competent".

However, she says she will not take part in such training programmes. And the reason being: "I am confident that I can get a job now."

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## Learn and earn

DOES it really get to the heart of the problem or is it just another money-wasting ploy?

The graduate training programmes have received mixed reactions from graduates across disciplines.

"The Government's intention of setting up such training programmes to reduce unemployment may be good, but some members of the public feel the money could be put to better use."

"Instead of using the money to review the university curriculum to better equip graduates with more relevant skills and knowledge, the Government is spending the money on 'on-training' programmes. It doesn't solve the root of the problem," a columnist writes on the popular forum site Lmyua.NET.

Many students and graduates use forums as a means to look for information on job hunting and career development.

Some graduates feel it is a waste of time to attend such training schemes, and that they are for those who are "less competent".

"I studied for three years to my degree. Why spend another six months attending a training programme that may or may not promise a job?" a graduate says.

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## Value-added grads

Getting employed may be a tough deal for some graduates but with the availability of some post-varsity job training programmes, it can be a different story altogether. >E8 & 9



Su Min has improved tremendously in presenting my confidence through the GAT programme.

Participants taking part in an activity which requires them to work as a group and put on their thinking caps.