

Fresh grads' starting pay hits new high

Slightly more landed jobs within 6 months of final exams, but lower proportion had full-time jobs: Poll

Calvin Yang

Despite the slowdown in the economy, fresh graduates from three Singapore universities were able to keep their heads above water last year.

Their starting pay hit a new high of \$3,360 a month, and slightly more of them landed a job within six months of finishing their final examinations.

A lower proportion, however, had full-time jobs, according to a joint graduate employment survey of 10,904 fresh graduates conducted last November.

The results of the survey, done by the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and Singapore Management University (SMU), were released yesterday.

The graduates' median pay, which is the midpoint salary in a range, was \$3,360 a month, up from \$3,300 for the class of 2015.

Also, 89.7 per cent landed a job within six months of finishing their exams, compared with 89.5 per cent in the previous year.

Education experts told *The Straits Times* that local graduates are still in demand, and many employers are willing to pay them well.

NUS economics lecturer Kelvin Seah, whose research focuses on the economics of education, said: "Despite the overall weak growth in the global economy last year, there were still many industries which managed to remain relatively unscathed and continued to grow."

Those enjoying strong growth were probably responsible for the rise in the median salary, he added.

The survey also showed that of the 89.7 per cent who found work, 80.2 per cent secured permanent full-time jobs, lower than the 83.1 per cent in 2015.

The rest did part-time, temporary or freelance work for various reasons. Many said they were either



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pursuing or preparing for further studies, starting business ventures or trying out a new field.

Dr Seah explained that the dip could also reflect the increased uncertainty faced by companies.

"External developments last year, such as the subdued growth in global trade, Brexit and weak investment growth in emerging markets and developing economies, may have led companies to exercise more caution in their expansion plans and the number of full-time workers hired," he said.

Graduates from SMU fared the

best, with 93.8 per cent of them becoming employed within six months of their final exams. At NUS and NTU, the figure was about 90 per cent. SMU graduates were also paid the most, earning a median gross monthly salary of \$3,500. Their peers at NUS received \$3,400, and those at NTU, \$3,300.

Similar surveys on the pay of fresh graduates from the Singapore University of Technology and Design and the Singapore Institute of Technology will be released later.

calyang@sph.com.sg

INCREASED UNCERTAINTY

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NUS ECONOMICS LECTURER KELVIN SEAH, on the lower proportion of graduates who secured permanent full-time jobs.

Those in computing see biggest starting salary jump

Raynold Toh

Computing seems to be the hottest ticket in town.

Graduates from the information systems course at the National University of Singapore (NUS) saw the highest jump in salaries, according to the latest graduate employment survey.

They took home a median monthly salary of \$4,000, a 12.7 per cent rise from 2015, when their seniors earned a \$3,550 pay cheque in their first month. Graduates from NUS'

computer science course also saw a pay rise, by 8.1 per cent – from \$3,700 to \$4,000.

Linguistics and multilingual studies graduates from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) enjoyed an increase of 12.2 per cent, from a monthly salary of \$3,000 to \$3,365. Third on the list were NTU's sociology graduates – their pay increased from \$3,125 to \$3,500, a 12 per cent jump.

The figures reflect the current job market, said Mr Adrian Tan, co-founder of Career Hero, a resume optimisation platform.

"Big companies are trying to break into the tech industry, while there has also been an increase in the number of tech start-ups. They have led to higher demand for computing graduates and software developers," he said.

He added: "Moreover, local universities are not producing computing graduates fast enough, but companies here cannot engage that many foreign employees because of hiring limits."

Besides computing, engineering graduates were also highly sought after, with NUS' electrical engineer-

ing graduates experiencing a pay jump from \$3,300 to \$3,500 – a 6.1 per cent rise.

"This could be due to the importance of hardware designing in the tech industry, which is not only about software," said Mr Tan.

Mr David Leong, managing director of PeopleWorldwide Consulting, a human capital provider and management company, said that as engineers are taught to approach problems systematically in their training, their skill sets will be in demand.

Those with degrees in law and medicine remained the most well paid across the universities.

Graduates with a degree in medicine from NUS were the highest paid, drawing \$5,000, followed by \$4,900 for NUS law graduates and \$4,850 for Singapore Management University law graduates.

raynoldt@sph.com.sg

Courses with highest pay jumps

National University of Singapore	Median gross monthly salary
Information systems	\$4,000, up 12.7 per cent
Computer science	\$4,000, up 8.1 per cent
Electrical engineering	\$3,500, up 6.1 per cent
Nanyang Technological University	
Linguistics and multilingual studies	\$3,365, up 12.2 per cent
Sociology	\$3,500, up 12 per cent
Mathematical sciences	\$3,500, up 8 per cent
Singapore Management University	
Business management	\$3,500, up 6.1 per cent
Economics	\$3,700, up 5.7 per cent
Information systems management	\$3,600, up 2.9 per cent

Source: GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT SURVEY STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS