

Fewer new grads land full-time jobs; 1 in 5 in temporary employment or traineeships

Nearly 70% of grads from 4 local unis found permanent work, down from 81.7% in 2019

Hariz Baharudin

Fewer students who graduated last year secured a full-time job, even though government programmes helped ensure most managed to find some form of employment.

Close to seven in 10 of those who graduated from four local universities last year found permanent employment, down from 81.7 per cent in 2019, an annual joint graduate employment survey released yesterday showed.

Over one in five fresh graduates, or 22.3 per cent, were employed in part-time jobs or traineeships, said the survey – the first of its kind to

give a broad picture of the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on young job seekers. This is more than triple the 7 per cent who found themselves in temporary or part-time jobs the year before.

Overall, 93.6 per cent of the 2020 cohort of graduates were employed within six months of completing their final examinations, up from 90.7 per cent in 2019. This figure included graduates in full-time, part-time, temporary or freelance work.

Manpower Minister Josephine Teo said yesterday that the noticeable drop in the percentage of graduating students in full-time work is something the Government is watching closely.

"What we also find very encouraging is that a significant number of them, or 22 per cent, took on part-time or temporary employment," she added, noting that about three in four of this group – or 16.9 per cent of fresh graduates – were in the SGUnited Traineeships Programme.

The traineeships were launched last June to give fresh graduates opportunities to gain experience and skills in order to boost their employability and give them a firmer foothold in the job market once the economy recovers.

Singapore Human Resources Institute president Low Peck Kem said that given how the quieter job market and hiring demand last year had affected graduate employment globally, it was "very encouraging" that close to 70 per cent of graduates managed to secure full-time employment.

She added that the SGUnited



Traineeships Programme cushioned the blow of Covid-19 to graduates significantly, saying: "The programme helped our young peo-

ple so that 'graduation' does not mean 'unemployment'."

The survey found that those who landed a full-time job earned a higher median starting salary of \$3,700 last year, compared with \$3,600 the previous year.

Those in the information and digital technologies and engineering sectors continued to draw the highest salaries.

Those who did courses such as computer science, cyber security and software engineering had the highest median gross monthly pay of \$4,760, as well as the highest rate of full-time permanent employment at 87.3 per cent.

Among the 22.3 per cent of fresh graduates last year who started work in part-time or temporary employment, the survey found that about half of them, or 11.3 per cent of all graduates, had involuntarily started working in such a role last year, a sharp increase from the 2.4 per cent in 2019.

Those in the SGUnited Traineeships Programme undergo an attachment with a firm and get a training allowance of which 80 per cent is funded by the Government, with employers footing the remainder.

The programme has been extended until March next year to continue supporting fresh job seekers graduating this year, in addition to those who have graduated in the

past two years. From April this year, the traineeships' maximum duration will be reduced from nine to six months to encourage employers to offer them full-time jobs.

National Trades Union Congress assistant secretary-general Patrick Tay, who also chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, said: "The skills and experience picked up through the traineeships and part-time engagements will give them a good start to accumulate working experience for future opportunities that come along."

The employment survey also found that the proportion of graduates doing freelance work was 1.5 per cent last year, a decrease from 2 per cent in 2019.

The survey polled 11,800 fresh graduates from full-time programmes at the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Social Sciences. The joint exercise was conducted around six months after the graduates completed their final exams.

As the surveys for the Singapore Institute of Technology and Singapore University of Technology and Design are ongoing, their results will be released later.

harizbah@sph.com.sg

The noticeable drop in the percentage of graduating students in full-time work is something the Government is watching closely, said Manpower Minister Josephine Teo. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



NEW GRADUATES' FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT AND SALARY NUMBERS

The Covid-19 pandemic had an uneven impact on graduates from different fields of study, with some like IT graduates weathering the storm better. New university graduates earned a higher median monthly pay of \$3,700, up from \$3,600 in 2019, according to an annual survey released yesterday.

Course clusters	Full-time permanent employment rate		Median gross monthly salary	
	2019	2020	2019	2020
Information and digital technologies	92.7%	87.3%	\$4,400	\$4,760
Health sciences	88.4%	83.3%	\$3,500	\$3,500
Business	88.8%	76%	\$3,500	\$3,500
Built environment	87.3%	72.5%	\$3,500	\$3,500
Engineering	83.3%	71.6%	\$3,750	\$3,900
Humanities and social sciences	74.5%	61.8%	\$3,500	\$3,500
Sciences	71.5%	55.4%	\$3,500	\$3,500
Arts, design and media	62.4%	50.1%	\$3,200	\$3,300
Overall	81.7%	69.8%	\$3,600	\$3,700

NOTE: Data from NTU, NUS, SMU and SUSS.



EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS OF FRESH GRADUATES

From full-time programmes (NUS, NTU, SMU, SUSS)

Proportion of graduates in the labour force who were:	2018	2019	2020
Employed	90.2%	90.7%	93.6%
In full-time permanent employment	81.2%	81.7%	69.8%
Freelancing	1.8%	2%	1.5%
In part-time/temporary employment	7.2%	7%	22.3%
• Voluntary	4.9%	4.6%	11%
• Involuntary	2.3%	2.4%	11.3%
Unemployed	9.8%	9.3%	6.4%
Unemployed but starting work soon	2.9%	2.9%	2.5%
Unemployed and still looking for a job	7%	6.4%	3.9%
Median gross monthly salary (Full-time permanent employment)	\$3,500	\$3,600	\$3,700

NOTE: Employment figures may not add up perfectly due to rounding differences. Includes graduates in the SGUnited Traineeships Programme.

Source: JOINT AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITIES GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT SURVEY 2020 STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Proportion of new grads in part-time or temporary work tripled last year

Deepa Sundar

More than one in five fresh graduates from four local autonomous universities were in part-time or temporary employment last year.

As a proportion of the newly graduated workforce, they more than tripled from 7 per cent in 2019 to 22.3 per cent.

A total of 11,800 fresh graduates from full-time programmes at the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore University of Social Sciences participated in the Joint Autonomous Universities Graduate Employment Survey 2020. They were surveyed on their employment status as at Nov 1, about six months after their final examinations.

Of the 10,700 respondents in the labour force, 22.3 per cent were in part-time or temporary jobs. Just over half of the graduates in this group had preferred to be in full-time permanent employment. The corresponding figure in 2019 was about one-third of those in part-time work that year.

Three out of four of the graduates in part-time or temporary work last November reported that they were then under the SGUnited Traineeships Programme.

The programme supports recent and soon-to-be graduates to take up traineeship opportunities across various sectors.



Ms Gracious Pang, 25, is undergoing training as an art instructor at Artlette Art Studio under the SGUnited Traineeships Programme. Her employer intends to offer her a full-time position after the training. PHOTO: ARTLETTE ART STUDIO

It aims to help them develop skills in a professional environment in the current economic climate and become better equipped to enter the job market when the economy recovers.

Ms Gracious Pang, 25, is undergoing training as an art instructor at Artlette Art Studio as part of the programme. The fine arts major, who graduated from Lasalle College of the Arts in 2019, had spent almost a year job hunting.

"After graduation, I couldn't find

a job, then (the pandemic) happened and it got even harder to find a job," said Ms Pang.

The traineeship proved fruitful as her employer, Artlette director Charlotte Loh, said she intends to offer Ms Pang a full-time position.

Ms Pang said she is thankful for the opportunity as she was able to learn more about the industry, including aspects such as administration and curriculum planning.

deepas@sph.com.sg

Those from less specialised fields hit harder, say experts

Graduates from less specialised fields felt the impact of the pandemic more and had greater trouble finding employment, experts told *The Straits Times*.

Conversely, those from courses that were more focused in a particular field were deemed to be of a "high priority" for hiring, the experts said when reflecting on the annual joint graduate employment survey released yesterday.

Across the board, fewer students who graduated last year managed to secure full-time jobs, but the effects were muted for those who studied IT, health sci-

ences and business. More than three in four graduates from courses in these fields secured full-time permanent jobs within six months of leaving university.

Graduates from more general disciplines did not do as well. Only about three in five from the humanities and social sciences found full-time permanent jobs, and those from arts, design and media as well as science courses had even less luck, with about half finding full-time work.

Singapore Human Resources Institute president Low Peck Kem said this was to be expected, considering how companies have had to be more careful about their spending amid Covid-19 disruptions.

"Companies would be more targeted in their selection process and hire those whose competencies and skills are sorely needed to run the business. That is why the specialised sector continues to do well – these skills are in high demand," she said.

Those in more general fields of study tend to be hit harder as limited hiring places would mean that priority would go to graduates trained for specialised roles who can hit the ground running, added Ms Low.

Ms Jaya Dass, managing director of recruitment agency Randstad Singapore, noted that the pandemic has caused a shift in priorities for companies, which are now

focusing on keeping their core business alive. This means that when hiring, firms would look out for candidates with more specialised skills who could potentially contribute more significantly to help a business survive.

"There is a need to keep the wheels on the bus turning, so priorities shift and companies would hire based on what is needed for their survival. It would be skewed towards specialised roles, and not generalists," she said.

The survey also showed that while full-time permanent employment might have fallen, more graduates are still finding jobs. Overall, 93.6 per cent of them were employed within six months of completing their final examinations, up from 90.7 per cent in 2019.

Mr Paul Heng, managing director of career consultancy NeXT Career Consulting Group, attributed this partly to help from the Government.

About 16.9 per cent of graduates were employed through the Government's SGUnited Traineeships Programme. This helps fresh graduates, including from polytechnics, boost their employability chances by going through an attachment at a company while receiving an allowance.

But associate professor of economics Walter Theiseira of the Singapore University of Social Sciences cautioned that while these graduates might be employed eventually, the quality of traineeships might vary.

He said: "There definitely are good traineeships in the programme, but not all of them will be a good match for the person. The question is, can these graduates build their resume or get relevant experience?"

Hariz Baharudin

>3 in 4

Proportion of graduates in IT, health sciences and business who found a full-time permanent job within six months of leaving university.

3 in 5

Proportion of graduates from the humanities and social sciences who found full-time permanent jobs within six months of leaving university. Those from arts, design and media as well as science courses had even less luck, with about half finding full-time work.