

Urgent reforms needed on education and jobs, says Syed Saddiq

By **Imran Ariff** - September 13, 2020 9:30 AM



A report has found that the Malaysian job market suffers from a mismatch between workers' skills and the types of jobs available. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: Former youth minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman has called for a much needed reform of the education and employment systems, as young jobseekers are reported to be finding it increasingly difficult to obtain jobs that suit their abilities and qualifications.

Syed Saddiq said that "it is high time the government works on a matching scheme in which you tie in the demand of corporates to the courses being taught in universities".

He said science stream courses in Malaysia often left many qualified graduates working outside the industry or being forced to look for jobs abroad.

More also needed to be done to facilitate hands-on industry training, Syed Saddiq told FMT in commenting on a report from a Singapore institute that the Malaysian job market suffers from a mismatch between workers' skills and the jobs available.

"I believe if our universities want to move forward and be a leader in producing good quality graduates, those universities can create university-assistance programmes to help students be exposed to the practical skills they need," he said.

Syed Saddiq also advocated for the promotion of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), as the employment rate for TVET graduates is 10-15% higher than for their university counterparts.



Former youth minister Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman.

"The acceptance rate for TVETs is extremely high, but the enrolment rate for such programmes is still disappointingly low," he said, adding that the government "needs to reach out to parents and students and introduce them to TVETs and the future it holds for the graduates in the working world".

Wage subsidy scheme to help those returning to employment

With Covid-19 further deteriorating the already unsteady job market, Syed Saddiq said the government should create a wage subsidy scheme to "ensure people who are not employed for a really long period of time are hired.



Shamsuddin Bardan.

"What seems like a mere subsidy to many is actually an investment by the government to prevent wastage of human capital. Everyone who strives hard to get an education qualification gave their best and deserves to utilise it."

This was echoed by Shamsuddin Bardan, executive director of the Malaysian Employers Federation, who said the numbers in the report reflected a "worrying" trend of late, with youth unemployment sitting at 13.1% in June.

To avoid getting stuck in jobs that don't match their qualification, he said young workers should "constantly upgrade their skills and knowledge after graduation, especially in response to demand for digital literacy and technological developments".

He also agreed that tertiary institutions must work with employers to ensure graduates meet industry needs, and move towards a model that prioritises work placements and practical training over theory learning.

Sam Haggag, country manager at recruitment specialists ManpowerGroup, said rapid technological advancements are creating skill needs that graduates are often unprepared for, particularly in regards to increasing industrial automation.



Sam Haggag.

"There is increasing danger that the young talent entering the market will not have the necessary skills to meet industry demands. The skills needed to succeed in these jobs will be very different from what we have seen before," he said, advising that "employers need to facilitate training opportunities for their talent".