SINGAPORE: Hiring prospects may take a hit this year against the backdrop of an uncertain economy.

If the number of job openings at the annual Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Career Fair is an indicator, it looks like some employers are holding back.

The fair has some 3,000 openings —— a drop of about 1,000 compared to last year’s. Close to 15,000 students are expected to attend the two—day event, held on February 7 and 10.

Two—hundred—and—twenty—one organisations are participating in the fair —— one—fifth from the public sector and the rest from the private sector.

Amid an uncertain economic climate, graduates are urged to set realistic targets.

NTU Undergraduate Education associate provost Kam Chan Hin said: “Graduates would have to taper their expectations somewhat.

"I really don’t expect that in Singapore, salaries will actually come down but it will probably not go up very much as well. "And you can see from this career fair, there are still lots of companies that are looking to hire. So that’s a very good sign for our graduates. "So my advice to all our students who are graduating this year —— you should take the opportunity to look for a job but don’t be too choosy and don’t set your expectations too high."

Professor Kam added: "The salaries will vary with different areas and different disciplines. "I think it will be roughly about the level of the previous year. Maybe a little bit up; I don’t expect it to come down, honestly, because I think the hiring is still very much going on in the industry. "Of course, in certain industries, the growth would not be as good, so in those areas, there would not be as many recruited as before."

Meanwhile, graduates had mixed reactions on nailing a job.

One graduate said: “It’s very difficult getting a summer internship these days so what are my chances? I have no idea. I guess I’ll try and see.”

Another added: “Currently the economy is not that good, but if you compare it to about three years ago, there’s a better chance."

"I understand it’s really tough to get a job nowadays. The question now is about sustaining ourselves and managing a career for ourselves. Right now, I’m just looking for a company that will give me an entry—level position and of my interest,” said another graduate.

On a brighter note, employers are more keen to employ interns.

For the Class of 2012, nearly 800 out of 4,000 undergraduate students received job offers from their internship companies.

DSO National Laboratories human resource assistant director Serene Tan said: "We are expecting to see if they are team players, whether they have the passion for R&D in their chosen discipline of work and the other aspect is really how proactive they are in wanting to learn about that particular area. "During the internship, whether it’s six or two months, the interns get an in—depth view of the organisation both from the work point of view, as well as the softer aspects like how do we live life, the work—life balance part of it."

Prof Kam added: "Credit Suisse was telling us that... the students (who) received offers during internships —— they are genuine in joining a company as opposed to somebody who simply walks into an interview. "And they would say ‘yes, I would like to join your company, but they are probably shopping around with two or three other offers.’ "And I think it gives both the graduate and the company the opportunity to assess each other."

A key focus for NTU is to ensure that more students gain overseas exposure. And that’s why for the first time, there’s a Japanese pavilion which will feature job openings at Japanese companies based in Singapore and in Japan."

Prof Kam added: "Increasingly, we are seeing many of the companies having global operations. "And I think for our graduates, what is important is that they don’t have just a narrow view of work, life and the industry as in what they just see..."
in Singapore.

"Of course, lots of companies have come and the range of jobs has been wider but what they should bear in mind is that in the future, probably, many of them will see as part of their career being sent for overseas operations and so on.

"So this exposure to people in other cultures, work practices and perceptions in the workplace is quite important for them to open their eyes to the fact that sometimes, there are different ways of doing things and sometimes, in different cultures, one way is better than another way."

— CNA/wk

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