

More grads settling for temp gigs

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University graduates are earning more, and their employability remains high, a joint employment graduate survey has found.

It polled 10,904 fresh graduates from Nanyang Technological University, National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University last year.

The results, released yesterday, showed that nearly nine in 10 graduates, or 89.7 per cent, found jobs within six months of their final exams, similar to previous years, while their median monthly salaries rose to a new high of \$3,360, \$60 more than in 2015.

But not all is rosy for the class of 2016, as more of them are taking on temporary positions until they land a job of their choice.

Of the 89.7 per cent with employment, 9.5 per cent settled for part-time, temporary or

freelance gigs, compared with 6.4 per cent in 2015. This means a drop of about 3 percentage points, among those with full-time jobs from 2015.

Biomedical engineering graduate Mindy Tan, for instance, has been working as a temporary administrative assistant for the past nine months.

The 24-year-old, who has been diligently applying for jobs, told The New Paper: “This job will have to do until a more suitable one comes along.”

Associate Professor Randolph Tan, a Nominated Member of Parliament, said graduates are not averse to taking up freelance gigs, which are on the rise, because they want to “shop around” for the best positions.

Taking on part-time, temporary or freelance positions allows them to try things out, the labour economist explained.

“The underlying reason this phenomenon increases during

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— Biomedical engineering graduate Mindy Tan, who has been working as a temporary administrative assistant for the past nine months

times of economic uncertainty — which last year would be easily characterised as — is also the same, namely the desire to search for a better ‘deal’.

“Understandably, everyone wants to work for the top employers — top meaning those giving the best benefits and with the best workplace conditions,” he told TNP.

SIM University labour econ-

omist Walter Theseira said demand for short-term contracts and temporary employment is also going up.

This is because many firms prefer to exercise financial discipline and will not create new full-time head counts, he said.

Associate Prof Tan said the jobs situation will improve only after the economy recovers.

“There is likely to be further delays this time around because of the added complications of restructuring.

“On the other hand, the labour market in some areas is still heavily in need of workers with the requisite skills,” he said.

As fresh graduates are still relatively cheap sources of labour compared with mature workers, the bigger challenge for them is finding a job of the right fit, said Dr Theseira.

“Some popular and important industries, like finance, are facing difficult times and muted

growth prospects. Even within industries, the in-demand skills have shifted.

“For example, within finance, there is great interest in exploring new business models facilitated by fintech, so graduates with both traditional finance skills, as well as knowledge of coding, are in greater demand compared to those who have only one skill set,” he explained.

Mature workers who may be drawing relatively high pay but lack the skills required for the changing job market are more vulnerable, he added.

“Of course, experienced and skilled workers are in high demand, but many workers do not have the right experience and skills for the changing job market.”

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