

# Higher education review panel must address skills mismatch, says MEF

The Malaysian Employers Federation says this has been a persistent issue where the expertise of job seekers does not match industry requirements.

Samuel Chua - 04 Feb 2023, 9:30am



*Skills mismatch has led to graduates being employed in semi-skilled and low-skilled jobs, leading to skill-related underemployment. (Bernama pic)*

**PETALING JAYA:** The committee to reform the higher education policy must address the issue of skills mismatch faced by graduates, says Malaysia's largest employer group.

The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) represents more than 5,000 organisations from various industries and sizes, and 22 industry groups.

It was responding to higher education minister Khaled Nordin's announcement that the government will review the national higher education policy to be in line with current realities.

MEF president Syed Hussain Syed Husman said skills mismatch has been a persistent issue where the expertise of job seekers, particularly fresh graduates, did not match industry requirements.

He said this has led to graduates being employed in semi-skilled and low-skilled jobs, leading to a situation of skill-related underemployment.

“Graduates are also not willing to learn from the basics when they are employed,” he told FMT. “The mindset of wanting to gain knowledge has to be built in and they need to understand that gaining knowledge takes time and will add value to them in the long run.”

To bridge the gap between industry needs and the skills mismatch, Syed Hussain said, there is an urgent need for graduates to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

“MEF proposes the establishment of closer partnerships between employers and higher education institutions to facilitate internships, apprenticeships and other forms of work-based learning, which will provide students with practical experience and enhance their employability.

“The government should also establish a robust quality assurance and accreditation system to ensure that higher education institutions are delivering high-quality education and training,” he said.

According to MEF's salary survey in 2021, the three top skills most lacking among fresh graduates are analytical skills (71.1%), management skills (68.4%) and data analysis skills (44%).

In terms of soft skills, fresh graduates lack problem-solving skills (66.3%), communication skills (52.8%) and leadership skills (44%).

Student-led movement Higher Education Malaysia Association (Heya) president Ooi Tze Howe said there is a dire need to improve governance, academics and student autonomy at institutions of higher education.

He said the appointment of university boards and their top management should be politically free and transparent, while adequate resources were needed to attract reputable academicians to lecture and conduct research.

“At the same time, the representative of the student union should sit on the university's board so that students have a voice in the university's development and management,” he said.

According to the International Labour Organization, skills mismatch has negative consequences for the productivity and competitiveness of companies, which affects their ability to implement new products, services or technologies.