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THERE is a running narrative that graduates and those about to enter the job market are out to demand big bucks. Failing which, they will whine and moan about baby boomer managers who only offer to pay them a pittance.

In fact, there is a big discrepancy between the expected salary of a fresh graduate and the actual starting salary offered.

Bank Negara's Annual Report for 2018 which revealed that after adjusting for inflation, the real starting monthly salaries for most fresh graduates have declined since 2010.

It was suggested in the Bank Negara report that the lack of high-skilled job creation could have played an integral role in the decline.

A salary survey by the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) also suggests that nominal starting salaries for graduates remain at modest levels.

A fresh graduate with a diploma earned a real salary of only RM1,376 in 2018 compared to RM1,458 in 2010.

There isn't a big difference between the expected salary and the salary that is actually offered, says MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan.

"The expected salary for fresh graduates with Diploma qualifications was 9% higher than the offered salary while it was 4% higher for fresh graduates with a Basic Degree, Honours degree as well as a Master's degree," he told *StarEdu*.

He advises jobseekers to consider a few factors, namely their qualifications, the company's background such as location, the benefits and bonuses offered, the market demand for that role and their living expenses when determining their expected salary.

He also says there are ways someone who has yet to graduate can start building up their worth while still studying.

"Gain experience by taking up part-time jobs or join internships."

He points out that 88% of the respondent companies in the MEF Salary Survey for Executives 2019 indicated that internships make graduates more employable and 86% of them said these graduates would be recruited if they met the other standards.

He also says future graduates should do their best to enhance their language and soft skills.

"Especially the command of English," he adds.

StarEdu spoke to a few students who will soon enter the job market to find out why they should be paid their preferred starting salaries, which they do not believe are

Don't sell yourself short

When you really want a particular job, negotiate over a salary band that you would be satisfied with and show potential employers that you are flexible and can have an open discussion about the salary.

too high to begin with.

Money does matter

For Kelvin Poh Song Yang, 22, the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector he wants to go into should be able to pay him his expected salary.

Most of these companies are big players and have management trainee programmes with relatively high starting salaries for outstanding graduates.

He hopes to receive a starting salary of RM3,000, which is above the average starting salary of RM2,600 for fresh graduates, according to the Malaysian Employers Federation.

He believes that the average salary for a management trainee in an FMCG company is above his expected salary at RM4,000.

He says he has based this on information gathered at networking events he has attended while still in university.

"I think RM3,000 is slightly more than fair in terms of my personal expected expenses," he says, adding that he isn't jaded and knows that his expenses would go up once he starts working.

Right now, his expenses hover around RM1,200 a month and that is just as an International Business and Marketing student.

He says this amount is just enough to cover his food, petrol, monthly phone bill and hanging out with his friends.

On whether a company could afford to pay such a high starting salary, Poh says that a company should be able to if they see the value in that candidate.

"I think it's not a matter of price but rather the value that the individual can bring to the team and the company as a whole."

Poh says the pay offered will be a determining factor when he starts looking for jobs after graduation.

He says he would turn down a job if the salary offered could not cover his daily living expenses.

"I would turn down a starting job if the salary was not able to cover my normal expenses but I would also factor in the other factors including career advancement opportunities and company culture,"

Expected and average starting monthly salaries for fresh graduates

Academic qualification	Expected salary (RM)	Actual salary (RM)
Diploma	1,879	1,704
Basic Degree	2,496	2,391
Degree with Honours	2,729	2,626
Master's Degree	3,417	3,285

Source: Malaysian Employers Federation Salary Survey for Executives 2019

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Shamsuddin advises future graduates to enhance their language and soft skills.

he adds.

On how much he thinks he would need every month just to survive once he starts working, Poh says he would need around RM2,400 with the addition of personal insurance, a car loan and giving his parents an allowance.

"I think that depending on which-ever starting salary I get, I would have to control my expenses and find ways to just cut wherever possible, and save more when possible," he adds.

He says that travelling, clothing and entertainment would be the luxuries he would give up just to be able to manage his expenses.

He reveals that he studied the Belanjawanku report by the Employees Provident Fund (EPF), and from that, he based his projected monthly budget once he embarks on his career.

The Belanjawanku report said that a person would need around RM2,490 to live a frugal lifestyle and own a car.

Poh says that having an opportunity to grow in a company is the second most important criteria he takes into account when deciding where to send his resume to.

"I don't really have any full-time experience as a fresh graduate," he points out.

Experience

through learning

Janice Chai Xin Hui, 20, believes that companies should give local

graduates jobs instead of hiring expatriates with higher salaries.

It is a known fact that companies have to pay expatriates more, including their benefit packages, for positions that can be filled by locals who are equally talented, she says.

"So why not hire a capable, local fresh graduate who can do the same job just as well?" she suggests.

The Bachelor of Mass Communications (Honours) Public Relations and Marketing student says that these companies can pay fresh hires a better salary if they did not bring in expatriates to work there.

"I know my own value, I believe that I can command a higher salary," she explains, adding that she has gained a lot of experience in her internships and has been involved in different social work such as the Kain Movement.

Kain Movement, which she co-founded together with four others, is a social enterprise set up to empower B40 women to earn a side income by upcycling used fabric into new, everyday items.

Chai still plans on doing another internship before she graduates in 2021 to continue building her network and skillset.

She says she researched online about starting salaries in her chosen field and found out that the average is actually around RM2,500. A good RM1,000 less than her expected salary.

She believes that Malaysian graduates have the same talent as their foreign counterparts and if a company can afford to hire expatriates,

who usually command higher salaries, they should definitely be able to provide better salaries for locals.

The chance to grow will be the key point when Chai starts job hunting after graduation.

She says that the learning experience and growth opportunity are the most important to her.

She would even be willing to consider working in a different sector from her chosen public relations field if she saw the potential for growth there.

"I would like, if possible, a balanced work environment whereby we're not overworked but we're challenged enough to actually grow and experience what it's actually like," she adds.

Although growth opportunities sit at the top of the list, she says she will turn down a starting job if the salary was much lower than her expected RM3,500 per month.

Chai says she currently lives with her family but is not sure whether she would have to rent her own place once she starts working.

"It would depend on the location," she says, adding that she is also eyeing jobs overseas.

"I believe that a starting pay that is slightly higher than RM2,500 would be better in the sense that we have to pay expenses on our own,"

Poh: I came up with my expected salary based on feedback from networking events with my chosen industry.

Chai: I have experiences through learning and internships.

Nabilah Hilsya: There are very limited opportunities for high-skilled jobs and they're very competitive.

Kavin: I will still join a company, despite them not meeting my expected salary.



she explains.

She also says her future expenses would include a car loan, depending on how far she has to commute for work, insurance and meals, as her parents take care of the food expenses right now.

The industry is booming

Kavin Rames, 23, says the exponential growth of his chosen industry means that companies can afford to hire him at his expected salary.

He says he expects to receive between RM2,500 to RM3,000 a month and wants to become either a sports journalist or sports psychologist.

"I think companies would be able to pay me this much, especially with the mixed martial arts industry booming right now," says the sports enthusiast.

"I found out online but also from friends working in the industry.

"I want to do something that has to do with sports as I've had a strong background in it," he says, adding that he started learning taekwondo at the age of 10 and moved into other combat sports such as kickboxing and muaythai.

"I think I deserve such a starting salary because of the type of skillset that I bring into the job itself is different," he explains.

He says that he has been freelancing as a sports writer for a sports blog.

Combined with his psychology background, he believes that this would make him a better interviewer as he understands people better.

Kavin says he will still join a company, despite them not meeting his expected salary.

"It's not just about the salary or the location. Will the job be interesting?" he questions.

He adds that he wants to be some-

where that allows him the chance to improve himself and advance his career.

Although he is willing to accept a lower salary, Kavin says he would not find it difficult to accept anything RM700 less than his expected salary.

Kavin says he knows his monthly expenditures will go up once he starts working, especially if he has to live away from his family.

I'm qualified

Nabilah Hilsya Hashim says she deserves to be compensated accordingly considering that she has both academic and industry experience.

"As a junior counsellor or therapist, I am expecting a range of RM2,000 to RM2,500 considering multiple aspects such as my expertise, resume and to cover my living expenses.

"Realistically, I don't think companies can afford to pay a fresh hire RM2,000 to RM2,500 a month but ideally, I would love for the company to actually meet my salary expectations," she says.

The 21-year-old adds that her job market research for human resource positions, the position she thinks hires the most psychology graduates, paints a very bleak future.

She says *Jobstreet* has shown that salaries only range from RM1,700 to RM2,400 for fresh hires in the field.

"Seeing the low salary does put me off wanting to join this field but I guess for me, my passion lies in psychology," she adds.

She says she discovered that most companies offer lower-skilled positions.

"Opportunities for high-skilled jobs are very limited and competitive," she explains, adding that she

needs a Master's degree to reach a goal of becoming a therapist.

Nabilah Hilsya says she wants to specialise in arts therapy which uses performing arts to treat patients.

"I chose to study psychology because it stems from a passion of interacting with human beings."

Even though she may not earn her ideal starting salary, Nabilah Hilsya says she would not immediately turn down a job offer.

She, like most others her age, want to be in a friendly working culture that encourages career growth.

"I'm a psychology student so of course I would want an environment that fosters interactions with colleagues.

"I think the kind of work culture that I'm looking for in a company is one that emphasises on work-life balance and on mental health wellbeing or emotional wellbeing," she says.

"However, I think the salary does play a role, especially when the living expenses are just too high," she adds.

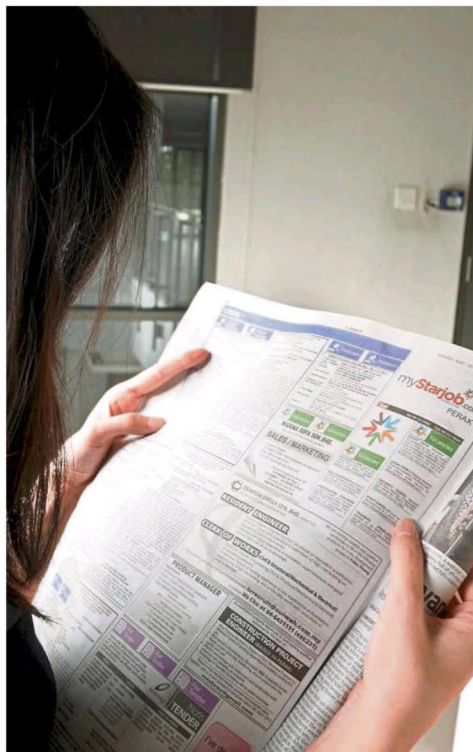
Nabilah Hilsya currently spends about RM1,500 a month as a student with most of her expenditure going towards rent and transportation.

"I'm living outside of campus, away from my parents and renting a room. I think I'll be doing the same when I start working.

"However, at my expected salary, I don't think it's enough as a living wage."

But she also acknowledges that the budget will need to be expanded once she starts working and things like loans, pocket money for her parents and personal savings coming into play.

"I don't think I will have a lot of savings left at the end of the month. I think I'll probably have RM100, which is not much per month."



Starting salaries are lower than what fresh graduates are expecting.