The Star

Post-SPM crossroads

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All the best: SPM candidates who sat for the examinations early this year are expected to receive their results soon. — Filepic



Thousands of school-leavers are eagerly anticipating the announcement of the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination results, which are due soon. These school-leavers will then have to make the crucial decision of selecting a tertiary programme or course based on their academic performance, as well as choosing a tertiary institution for their higher education.

Parents also experience heightened anxiety as guiding their children in balancing passion, future opportunities and financial considerations can be a challenge.

So, what should SPM school-leavers and their parents consider when making these decisions? Here are some key factors:

> IntrospectionIntrospection can help identify the skills and knowledge students need to achieve their goals.

It involves reflecting on one's strengths and weaknesses, preferred learning styles, and personality, and mapping these to long-term career goals.

By examining their long-term goals, SPM school-leavers can align their educational paths with their desired career trajectories.

Educational pathway choices are also inherently related to preferred learning styles. While some are more attuned to traditional learning styles and have strengths suited for conventional programmes such as engineering and computer science, others may be better in hands-on and vocational learning.

Consider whether the student will thrive in structured classroom settings, prefers hands-on experiences, or enjoys independent study.

Introspection plays a key role in guiding school-leavers towards an environment that suits their learning styles as it helps them to understand themselves better.

This can ensure an educational journey that is both potentially fulfilling and purposeful.

> InterestsChoosing a course based on genuine interest often ensures that one remains engaged and motivated throughout one's educational journey. Interest is also related to passion, which drives excellence and perseverance.

Nevertheless, in pursuing their passion, SPM school-leavers should ensure that their fields of interest offer viable careers in terms of long-term industry demand and marketability.

If your passion does not offer a clear career pathway, consider acquiring a formal qualification and pursuing your passion as a side hustle or gig.

> Job opportunities The World Economic Forum, in its recent report, predicts that some jobs will grow by 10.2% while others will decline by 12.3%, with a net decrease of 2% (or 14 million jobs) in current levels of employment over the next five years.

The same report notes that future jobs in high demand for 2030 and beyond will include data analysts and scientists, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning specialists, digital marketing professionals, healthcare professionals, renewable energy specialists, cybersecurity experts, content creators, digital business and marketing experts, and environmental scientists.

When selecting a course, every school-leaver needs to understand future trends and industry demand.

The working world is changing at a massive pace. Traditional jobs, particularly those that are repetitive and driven by lower-order thinking, may be displaced by machines or even disappear completely.

Being aware of future job markets and industry trends can better prepare students for uncertainties in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world.

Knowing which skills will be in demand helps students choose courses that align with future needs.

Future jobs may require flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to learn new skills.

Skills such as data analysis, design, critical thinking, AI applications and emotional intelligence are valuable for students to have and should factor into their decision-making when selecting courses.

> Broad-based optionsSome programmes, like law and medicine, are very focused and are a good fit for individuals who are certain about pursuing those paths.

However, given the ever-evolving industrial and technological landscape, students who are uncertain may benefit from pathways that offer greater flexibility.

Foundation pathways are designed to help students gain familiarity with a broad domain of knowledge, such as engineering, over a year.

This gives students time and experience to consider whether they want to further their studies by specialising in specific areas of engineering.

A similar approach can be applied when considering courses in business, finance, accounting, computing, hospitality, architecture, psychology or technology.

Meanwhile, most diploma programmes also allow students to explore their interests more deeply and decide what they want to do in two years.

> Institutional reputationInstitutional reputation should play a major role in guiding both parents and students in deciding where to pursue studies.

While university rankings are important, they should not be the sole determinant.

It is equally important to consider the graduate employment rate (which can measure industry acceptance of graduates in a particular programme), cultural diversity (a mix of local and international students for a global outlook), the availability of state-of-the-art infrastructure, and the salaries that graduates from the university earn, based on data from the Higher Education Ministry.

> AffordabilityOver the last few decades, international destinations have been a top choice for M40 and T20 parents when deciding where to send their children to study.

However, times have changed. With more restrictive visa conditions, and a weaker Malaysian ringgit compared with the euro and US dollar, many parents are now considering local institutions as an alternative.

As such, the following questions seem natural: Does a university or college offer a conducive learning environment? Does it have good and specialised labs for newer programmes such as cybersecurity, virtual reality, augmented reality, AI, robotics, and fintech infrastructure? Does it promote cultural diversity?

In sum, parents should look for institutions that offer world-class, state-of-the-art infrastructure and education at an affordable price.

Deciding on one’s future is not easy. Take your time, reflect, and seek advice from those with expertise before making your choice. Wishing all SPM students the very best!

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