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## Brand Spotlight



### Students should discern if they really need to get a university degree

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TODAY file photo

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I refer to the report, “**Lower pay, discrimination: Some of the hurdles facing private university grads**” (April 8).



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findings from the recent Private Education Institute Graduate Employment Survey.

The question we should consider is the extent to which a university degree is still needed in Singapore, be it one that is obtained from a private education institute or any of the autonomous universities here.

Evidently, the odds seem more heavily stacked against graduates from private education institutes.

For the class of 2016/2017, the full-time employment rate of these graduates was 47.4 per cent, six months after graduation. This is a sharp drop from the 60.1 per cent of their seniors in the class of 2015/2016.

The 47.4 per cent full-time employment rate is also 31 percentage points lower compared to graduates from the autonomous universities.

The S\$2,650 median gross monthly salary of a private school graduate is also S\$750 lower.

Among the many private education institutes sampled in the graduate employment survey, there were some that did fairly well, such as the Singapore Institute of Management. However, the poor overall performance is of concern.

Notwithstanding the legitimate concerns over perceived discrimination against private school graduates at the workplace, a more pragmatic solution would be to educate and to encourage students from the institutes of higher learning (junior colleges, polytechnics) to consider their areas of specialisation and their aspirations, before deciding whether they should matriculate in a university.



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ASPIRE (Applied Study in Polytechnics and ITE Review) committee as well as the broader SkillsFuture initiative provide a good foundation.

Of course, changing the perceptions of the university degree as the “be-all and end-all” remains a tall order. Perhaps the aforementioned statistics could persuade students — or their parents — to be more judicious.

Second, regardless of one’s enrolment in a private education institute or an autonomous university, students should be encouraged to build their skills and to accrue internship stints beyond the varsity.

While it may be true that some autonomous universities provide their students with more opportunities and resources, it does not necessarily hold that compared to graduates from autonomous universities who have the luxury of time to do internships during the school curriculum, there is a less emphasis for students from private education institute to do so, as one student mentioned.

The antiquated belief that good grades and a good degree automatically lead to a good job is less likely to materialise these days.

And in this vein, challenging the need for a (private) university degree is, by extension, a challenge to the notion that lifelong learning stops upon graduation.

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