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Forging Future-Ready Graduates: Insights from the Talentbank Academia-Industry Graduate Recruitment Dialogue

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On December 4, 2023, the Talentbank Graduate Recruitment Dialogue took place at Sunway University in partnership with Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Majlis Kebolehpasaran Graduan (MyGRAD), and the National Career Development Centre Association Malaysia (NACDA). Nearly 50 representatives from both public and private Malaysian universities engaged in an extensive discussion alongside more than 130 industry representatives. This event facilitated an open and constructive dialogue between academia and diverse sectors of industry. The dialogue specifically addressed critical issues across three dedicated sessions:

Session 1: Bridging Academia and Industries in Cultivating Future-Ready Graduates

The first session delved into the crucial question of how to bridge the gap between academia and industry. Participants explored strategies and initiatives aimed at nurturing graduates who not only possess the necessary knowledge but are also equipped with the skills essential for a dynamic professional landscape. Proposed solutions included the implementation of structured industry internships, collaborative projects, and mentorship programmes to provide students with real-world exposure and practical skills.

Session 2: How to Overcome Barriers for Tech Graduates

During the second session, the focus shifted to the obstacles encountered by tech graduates. Industry experts and academic leaders pooled their insights to devise actionable strategies, aiming to equip the upcoming cohort of tech professionals for the continuously evolving technological landscape. The solutions proposed aim at enhancing communication skills for tech graduates, adapting to fast-paced technology changes, and addressing expectations for longer tenure and higher starting salaries. Graduates must quickly grasp new technology as it evolves, and universities should emphasize problem-solving skills to keep graduates competitive.

Session 3: Nurturing an Entrepreneurial Mindset and Connecting Universities and Industries to Encourage Future Innovators

The third session focused on fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates. Participants discussed the importance of connecting industries to inspire and support future innovators, recognizing the significance of entrepreneurial skills in driving economic growth and innovation. The proposed solutions involve integrating entrepreneurship courses, setting up campus incubators, organizing networking events, facilitating mentorship programmes, collaborating on practical research projects, and hosting industry-sponsored competitions. These initiatives aim to connect academia with industry, empowering students to thrive in entrepreneurship by providing skills, resources, and valuable connections.

Initiated by Talentbank, this dialogue has emerged as a key platform for collaboration, fostering a shared commitment between academia and industries in shaping national graduates into skilled professionals. One standout feature of the dialogue was its interactive nature. Questions from participants were posted live on the screen, fostering dynamic discussions. At the event, industries were encouraged to take on a role as creators of the workforce, investing not only in recruitment but also in partnering with universities to influence curricula, offer practical insights, and actively participate in mentoring programmes.

The event concluded with an exclusive Talentbank Industry-Academia Appreciation Dinner graced by distinguished guest Prof. Dr Azlinda Azman, Ketua Pengarah Pendidikan Tinggi. In her address to industry-university leaders, she highlighted significant milestones in graduate employability, reaching 92.8% in 2022 with a 4.6% increase from the previous year, alongside a rise in employed graduates to 69%. Despite these achievements, concerns surfaced: 48.5% of public university graduates earned below MYR 2000 as starting salaries, and 42% didn't secure jobs in their fields of study.

Moreover, she also addressed four crucial insights: (1) aligning university programmes with industry needs, (2) proposing industry-based upskilling programmes; (3) advocating a benchmark salary of RM3,000, and (4) the importance of global preparedness, urging academia-industry collaborations to provide international experiences, foster cultural awareness and enhance global competitiveness.

In conclusion, the Talentbank events have paved the way for a fresh era of collaboration aims to revolutionize Malaysia's education and employability landscape. From bridging gaps in skills to fostering entrepreneurship, this event emphasized active industry involvement in shaping industry-ready graduates. As the Head of UiTM's Graduate Employability Unit and a committed member of Majlis Kebolehpasaran Graduan dan Kerjaya Universiti Awam Malaysia (MyGRAD), there is a resolute commitment to implementing these insights, ensuring UiTM's steadfast dedication to producing competitive graduates.

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