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Headline: Pay for fresh university graduates rose last year; strong job prospects for those in IT

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Fresh grads took home a median monthly salary of \$3,500, up from \$3,400 in 2017, according to results of a joint graduate employment survey released on Feb 26, 2019. PHOTO: ST FILE

SINGAPORE - Fresh university graduates earned a higher starting pay last year (2018), with those in the information technology sector registering the highest rates for full-time permanent jobs.

Fresh grads took home a median monthly salary of \$3,500, up from \$3,400 in 2017, according to results of a joint graduate employment survey released on Tuesday (Feb 26).

The survey, conducted last November, also found that 81.2 per cent of new graduates were in full-time permanent work, higher than 78.4 per cent in 2017.

Overall, 90.2 per cent of them were employed, up from 88.9 per cent in 2017. This refers to graduates in full-time, part-time, temporary or freelance work.

The proportion of those doing freelance work fell from 2.4 per cent in 2017 to 1.8 per cent last year. And the percentage of unemployed graduates or those still looking for a job or the ones in part-time work not by choice dropped by 2.1 percentage points.

For the first time, the annual survey also released employment outcomes by course clusters, to help students make decisions on course choices.

"This is to help students make decisions on course choices more holistically, taking into account broad subject disciplines rather than just individual degree outcomes," the statement on Tuesday said.

Across the universities, graduates from the information and digital technologies, business and built environment courses had the highest full-time permanent employment rates. Engineering graduates recorded strong improvements in employment, and median gross monthly salaries grew across all disciplines last year.

The annual survey polled 11,200 fresh graduates from full-time programmes in four universities - the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Management University (SMU) and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS).

The joint exercise is conducted by the six autonomous universities to collect information on the employment status of their graduates six months after their final examinations.

Due to different academic calendars, NUS, NTU, SMU and SUSS conduct their surveys in November each year, while the Singapore University of Technology and Design polls its graduates in February and the Singapore Institute of Technology in March.

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The universities said that a significant proportion of their graduates managed to find full-time jobs after through internships. For instance, more than a third of SUSS' first batch of full-time accountancy graduates were offered jobs through work attachments, which is a requirement for graduation.

At NTU's Nanyang Business School, more than one in three business and computing graduates were hired by the companies they interned with.

Half of the graduates from SMU who had job offers before finishing school received them through internships, which are also compulsory for them.

SMU graduate Tay Jing Ying is now a technology analyst at the Bank of America Merrill Lynch, where she had done an internship in her third year of university.

The 24-year-old information systems graduate said: "I tell my friends that we're quite lucky to graduate at the right time, when a lot of companies are using technology to improve systems and work processes, and they need IT graduates.

"At the same time in today's world working is not just about showing you have technical capabilities, it's about how you can network with people, and show you're a confident person."

SUSS graduate Nurul Amira Azhar, 24, who started work in July last year as a media analyst with media intelligence firm Meltwater, said she decided to study marketing as it involves a mix of creative and business skills.

"There is a lot of data coming in on different platforms, from both mainstream media and social media, so there is growing demand for analysts in this field," she said.