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Diploma or foundation studies?

PRE-UNIVERSITY CHOICES: Decision time for Form Five school-leavers

O. C. YEAP
ocyeh@nst.com.my

THESE days, those who wish to further their studies after Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) will have no lack of options.

This week, we look at diploma courses and foundation programmes available in our tertiary institutions.

Foundation programmes, which are generally one year, are more of a background to a degree course that the student has interest in.

Tertiary institutions each have its own foundation programmes tailored for their students.

Students who have yet to decide on what to specialise in will find that the foundation year is useful preparation for the main degree programme they will be undertaking after that.

During this year, they will be exposed to a range of subjects including some not directly related to their area of interest but will give some ideas on the possible future options.

Dr Sarvinder Kaur Sandhu, head — School of Foundation at Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU), said that the APU Foundation programme is designed to prepare those with SPM/O levels or equivalent qualifications to develop the skills and knowledge to progress into the first year of their degree of choice with APU.

"Recognising that students may not have made a firm decision on which degree to pursue after leaving school, academic staff of APU's School of Foundation Studies are always on hand to advise students on their options, and the routes that best suit the students' interests and abilities," she said.

"All this is to ensure that students are in the best position to make informed decisions about their future careers, and are then able to confidently pursue their degree of choice."

Azam Smajic, from Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (Unirazak), said he underwent a Foundation Year in Humanities and Social Sciences

before proceeding to his BA in Government and Public Policy degree course.

Azam said he chose to do the foundation because it included subjects such as psychology and sociology which he was interested in.

Diploma courses are for students who already know what they want to study and are subject-specific.

The duration of a diploma course is generally between two and three years.

Diploma students can start working after they complete their studies, or go on to a degree course with exemptions.

Sarvinder said that diploma programmes are focused on specific areas of study and are designed for those who have already chosen their academic and career pathways.

"The diploma programme content is aimed at providing students with practical and technical skills, and provides tremendous opportunities for students to enter the world of employment in their chosen fields as entry-level professionals," she said.

Both routes are therefore equally good in their own way.

The duration to achieving a degree is almost the same, with the diploma route being only slightly longer.

Sarvinder said that students who are unsure of their future careers would find that the APU Foundation programme provides greater flexibility with wider opportunities for degree study.

"Compared to the diploma, the foundation programme is more suitable for students who have yet to decide on their study and career pathways, and who wish to explore different areas before they commit on their choice of degree programme," she said.

To Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) lecturer Evelyn Yeap Ewe Lin, undertaking a diploma course is a good option as students get to

transfer their credits should they do a degree course later.

"There will be subjects that they do not need to take again in their degree, which will reduce the duration of their degree course," she said.

Yeap added that in order to graduate with their diploma, students are given final-year projects and also have to go for industrial training.

"At UNITEN, we conduct internal training for soft skills. This means that diploma grads are ready to enter the working world immediately after their studies," said Yeap.

"The fee to enrol in a diploma course is also cheaper, although UNITEN does provide financial assistance as well."

Samantha Wong Mei Ling, a Diploma in Computer Science student at UNITEN, said she chose this route because "after that, I get to decide whether to continue my studies or enter the workplace."

"Students who do not have enough money to continue their studies can always work first."

Wong added that for students who choose to go on with the degree course, the entire duration may be longer but will be less intensive.

Ahmed Yaman Nazeem, a student from the Maldives, said that while doing his Diploma in Accountancy course at KDU University College, he received holistic education in and outside of the classroom.

"I even gained insight into how businesses work here," he said.

Dr Teh Lah Hoong from SMK (P) Sri Aman said that her school's Counselling Unit provides the latest information on post-SPM choices to its students.

"Students who have the financial means but are undecided on their career future usually opt for foundation programmes which provides them flexibility in options," she said.

"However, those who have decided on their career paths will usually opt for diploma courses."

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