

# Evaluation of courses that go beyond employment



By [Dzul kifli Abdul Razak](#) - August 17, 2022 @ 12:13am



Those who are fully employed are equally vulnerable when their lives are not fulfilled. - NSTP file pic

RECENTLY, we read that some universities are cutting out or cancelling courses because they are allegedly "impractical" or no longer wanted by the industry in an attempt to remain industry-friendly".

In other words, the courses are said to be irrelevant to the "market needs". This makes sense in the context of providing employment as shown in studies such as the Graduate Tracer Study carried out by the local public universities.

Interestingly, in Malaysia, university courses are generally subjected to a market survey before they are offered to students, provided they are endorsed by the market.

Otherwise, they will not see the light of day, as in the case of several courses in the social sciences and humanities that the market did not fancy!

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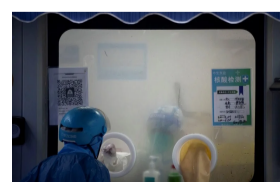
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This is how critical courses like philosophy, gender and local indigenous studies are overlooked since they're not seen as "marketable".

Unfortunately, for many good academic reasons, it is not as simple and straightforward as it is described.

In general, it can be argued that this is due to a lack of clarity regarding the criteria used for graduate marketability, and thus employability, as raised by the previous online column (NST, July 26).

Therefore, the context remains vague and tends to give rise to at least five major contestations that have yet to be satisfactorily explained.

Even if all of them are well rationalised, reviewing current courses on a regular basis is one academic practice that all reputable institutions of higher learning engage in without much publicity or fanfare.

In fact, the accreditation agency requires this for reasons other than just ensuring graduate employability (as claimed).

More specifically, graduate relevance in relation to the institutional-national vision and mission, which far exceeds so-called "market needs" alone but is often lost in translation.

In fact, the pandemic exposes the "real" weaknesses of the conventional understanding of employability as a means to better livelihood (especially material gains) but cares little about its socio-emotional impact related to the human "life" itself.

This is well amplified as one of the failures of education fashioned during the pre-Covid-19 period when the ecosystem and language resembled more of a factory to primarily produce "lifeless" economic goods for a particular market.

Success is built on this model, which is expressed in numbers and figures known as Key Performance Indicators.

Concerningly, little seems to link education to societal well-being; rather, what is more important is being human. The commoditisation of education and knowledge has led to excesses that affect mankind, regardless of the employability status.

Those who are fully employed are equally vulnerable when their lives are not fulfilled.

In addition, the Higher Education Ministry's survey last year revealed that 14,665 graduates in the social sciences, commerce and law had the highest rates of unemployment.

According to the same survey, this was surpassed by more than 10,000 when compared with those in the sciences, mathematics and computing.

Does this mean that more social sciences, law and humanities courses will be discontinued?

Do we risk reducing universities to just another industrial cog-and-wheel machine to serve a narrow-vested interest espoused by the market?

Ultimately, design that prefers a more mechanical one in the name of productivity threatens the very notion of being human. As we moved into the Anthropocene era, this tendency gets more pronounced.

Simply put, discontinuing a course is only the tip of the iceberg when it



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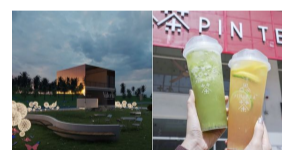
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If this is the end-goal, all Anthropocene-driven courses must cease immediately.

The current ecosystem must be humanised towards nurturing *insan sejahtera* within the framework of the national educational philosophy. Therefore, it is not just about discontinuing courses for the sake of meeting industry demands, but a whole gamut that makes people more human.

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The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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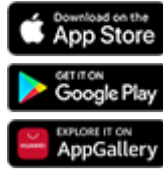
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