Employers looking more at graduates’ soft skills

By MELODY ZACCHEUS

EMPLOYERS are increasingly looking beyond academic results and hiring fresh graduates based on their soft skills.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the National University of Singapore’s annual career fair on Tuesday, provost Tan Eng Chye said this was borne out by a 2012 survey by the university’s Career Centre.

It found that employers look out for candidates with good interpersonal and communications skills and for team players with initiative, passion and commitment. About 50 employers were surveyed.

It has rolled out two career preparatory modules – HeadStart and StepUp – and career portal TalentConnect to better equip students with the soft skills necessary for the working world.

The HeadStart module for freshmen and second-year students and the StepUp module for graduating students equip them with resume writing, interview and networking skills.

About 2,000 employers have already signed up with TalentConnect since its soft launch last October.

The portal provides job-matching services and will later offer features such as alumni-student mentoring.

Ms Leei-Hung Chen, vice-president of service management and sales at Global Blue, the world’s biggest operator of tax-refund points for tourists, said soft skills rank even higher for global firms.

“It’s important that we hire dynamic individuals who can interact with people from countries such as China and Germany, where English may not be their first language.”

Some 217 employers - a 20 per cent increase from last year - are taking part in the two-day fair. More than 4,200 job opportunities are available and 92 employers - including Abercrombie & Fitch, Siemens and Estee Lauder - are participating for the first time.

Provost Tan urged graduating students to be more flexible and open to various job options.

He said: “Sometimes, this involves pursuing an unconventional path, or an adjustment in one’s expectations...Some contract jobs, for example, may offer opportunities for exposure to certain industries which you may, in time to come, discover a passion for.”

Engineering undergraduate Kevin Teo, 24, who was applying for a position with a homegrown shoe chain at the fair, is taking this advice seriously.

He sees no harm in applying for a job in an unrelated field that may also require him to lower his salary expectations.

He said: “I can make use of my logistics and supply chain management know-how, which I picked up from my degree programme, in a job where I get to interact more actively with people.”

Engineering student Zhou Liuen (above) visiting the Singapore Airlines booth at the NUS career fair on Tuesday. Some 227 employers are taking part in the event. Paying heed to Provost Tan’s advice to be open to various job options, engineering undergraduate Kevin Teo (below) has applied for a position with a shoe chain. ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG