A F حسين ion I am asked by students about to graduate is whether they can get a good job with their soon-to-be-awarded degree or diploma. Some are even more lost and enquire about the field or industry they should choose.

Amazing as it may sound, many young adults pursue university degree and polytechnic diploma programmes without the faintest clue of the career or job they will pursue on graduation.

Failing to plan your career today is a sure way to plan to fail in your career. It is therefore important to attend career workshops during your university or polytechnic years.

Nearly every university or tertiary institution in Singapore offers some form of career-related workshop or guidance, as either a compulsory requirement or an optional choice. If you have not attended career workshops before, here is a quick primer.

The career plan

Anyone embarking on a university degree or even a polytechnic diploma programme must start working on his career plan immediately once he settles down in his first year. A career plan is not just a career road map. It is not just a description of action you will take in the next three to five years. The career plan is a blueprint of your future.

It must profile your current skills, abilities, talents, values, interests and limitations. Without this, you cannot have a foundation or framework to build your career roadmap or your career. This profile will help you to identify your developmental needs in terms of abilities, competencies and other interests.

It is integral to do a structured career choice exercise before you can even start writing or mapping your career plan. Use a career assessment tool to explore your career options.

The various better-known career assessment tools are based on established career choice theories. These tools help you to identify suitable career choices based on skills, interests, values and other personal traits.

Based on what you learn about yourself, you can then chart your career strategy, career goals and subsequently your career roadmap.

Employers are becoming increasingly selective in hiring the right candidate for the job. They are seeking individuals who have skills and knowledge necessary to do their job at high standard.

Paper qualifications, a polytechnic diploma or a university degree are sometimes not enough. You may need professional certification and internship experience to attest to your knowledge and skills.

Make use of your plan

If you have a career plan worked out before the start of your second year, you can initiate action to fill the "missing" elements employers will seek from you. This may include taking up specialised professional courses, seeking internships or part-time work employers may appreciate in a potential candidate. This also demonstrates to potential employers your commitment to the vocation, profession or occupation.

When you graduate, you will not only have a paper qualification but also possibly a professional certification and internship experience.

The career plan is vital not only in terms of setting the goals and strategy for your career, but is also a useful tool to help you answer interview questions.

This may include questions like: Where do you expect to be in five years’ time? What do you want to do if you are unsuccessful at this interview? What do you believe are your personal qualities that make you an ideal candidate for this job?

In short, the career plan is a versatile career resource document to help you clinch that much desired job. So, don’t miss out on the career workshops and guidance offered by universities and polytechnics. They will help you kickstart your career plan.

Knowledge is power. The more you study careers, the better prepared you will be for your future.

To contribute, contact us at recruit3@sph.com.sg.