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Recession? Student part-timers in demand

Wanted: Work - any work - and willing to clock longer hours on the job

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That is the calling card of this year's batch of young applicants looking for year-end jobs, including those waiting for their O- and A-level results and undergraduates on holiday.

Despite more of them hoping to land positions in a bid to help out family finances in the downturn, they are in luck.

A check with employers and temping agencies shows bosses favouring the hiring of part-time rather than full-time staff.

Mr Tay Kok Choon, country manager of JobStreet Singapore jobseeking service, said recruitment of full-time staff has almost come to a standstill.

For firms whose business depends on seasonal demand, it is natural to hire "part-time staff first before engaging them full-time", he said.

He said that the number of jobs available has remained stable but he has seen a two-fold increase in students registering for work and internships this year.

Ms Annie Yap, chief executive officer of recruitment firm GMP Group, said the retail and food and beverage sectors, as well as packing and gift-wrapping firms, are a big source of part-time jobs at the year end. This is always the case during the festive period.

Human resource companies said pay has not fallen despite the recession, with many employers offering a standard rate of \$5 to \$6 an hour.

Gloria Chiang, 16, who is waiting for her O-level results, recently found a job selling clothes for 10 hours a day over five days in a trade fair at the Singapore Expo.

"Everyone's rushing to find jobs but it seems more companies are also eager to hire part-timers, so it was quite easy to get a job," she said.

One company, Dairy Farm, which runs Cold Storage and Guardian pharmacy among other businesses, has taken in more than 300 part-timers - including students - to work as sales assistants, cashiers and order-takers.

The Singapore Zoo is also hiring more part-time staff. There are now around 700 students working in all three Wildlife Reserves Singapore parks - Jurong BirdPark, Night Safari and the zoo.

More hiring part-timers
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Youth interviewed said earning money is their top priority.

"It was really important to find a job because the economy is so bad. I'm trying to work longer hours," said Secondary 3 student Sean Ng, 17.

Logging nine-hour workdays since last month as a waiter at BBQ Chicken restaurant in West Coast Plaza, he can earn up to \$50 a day. His mother is unemployed and gets a monthly allowance of \$300 from her former husband.

Also aiming to be more self-reliant is Johan Burhanuddin, 16, a barista at Tully's Coffee in Far East Square.

The teen, who is waiting for his O-level results, can earn about \$49 a day doing nine-hour shifts. He gives up to 40 per cent of his pay to his single-parent mother who is a section leader at Cold Storage.

He also gives his nine-year-old sister some money and is saving some for his education as he hopes to study in a polytechnic.

Employers have noted the desire of these young workers to do more.

At Spinelli Coffee Company, which has about 24 part-timers working this school holiday, a spokesman said: "In general, students seem more willing to work longer hours and make more money."

Over at Genesis BBQ, which runs the BBQ Chicken restaurant chain, chief operating officer Benny Ng said: "We have had students asking for jobs as early as September. In the past, on average, they worked six hours, three days a week. This year, most are willing to work as long as eight hours, five days a week."

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What are your views on students taking on part-time jobs to help with the family finances? Send them to suntimes@sph.com.sg