

## **The Straits Times 16 June 2007, Saturday, Home Pg4**

### **Laid-off older professionals find jobs more easily**

By KEITH LIN

OLDER degree holders are doing much better now in landing a job.

Official figures show that more university graduates got a job within six months of being laid off than workers holding other qualifications.

By educational level, their re-employment rate was 67.6 per cent as at end-March, according to the Manpower Ministry report on the labour situation here in the first three months of this year.

The report released yesterday also said the job-seeking success of those in their 40s showed the best improvement compared to other age groups. Their re-employment rate was 61.8 per cent.

Human resource consultants said the brighter prospects facing older graduates is due to a buoyant Singapore economy that is hungry for workers.

Almost half of the 32,200 vacancies between January and March this year were for the Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians group, or PMETs.

Another factor is the mindset change among employers, with more willing to hire older PMETs, said Ms Rosa Goh, country manager of recruitment agency Manpower.

Increasingly, they are prized for their know-how and expertise.

Citing the construction sector, where many projects are expected to be completed quickly, Mrs Josephine Teo, NTUC's director of human resources, said: "Hiring PMETs makes sense, as they are already equipped with the experience to know what is required to bring the project to fruition."

As a result, older PMETs now take three months to land a job compared to six months to a year previously, said Ms Annie Yap, managing director of GMP Group.

Initiatives such as the Professionals Conversion Programme have also helped several out-of-work PMETs start again in new careers.

The programme, developed by the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and NTUC, helps PMETs upgrade their skills or chart new careers.

A WDA spokesman told The Straits Times that 47 such workers have been placed in new and growing industries, such as the digital media, logistics and information technology sectors.

Another 99 are being trained to take up such jobs as chefs, commercial aircraft engineers and retail managers.

The programme has 12 courses. Its latest - helping mid-career workers become pre-school principals.

WDA's manager of this new course Lim Tai You said their work experience will go a long way in managing kindergartens.

Some course providers are also tweaking their training curriculum for older workers.

Culinary academy at-sunrice intends to make its course curriculum less strenuous, for example, sparing older workers from carrying heavy food trays.

"Ultimately, it's having the right attitude, and not age that counts," said its recruitment manager Benedict Koh.

One PMET embarking on a second career is Mr Kenny Loh, 58. The former human resource executive, who did contract work for the past two years, now has a full-time job at Rulang Primary, helping teachers organise activities for sports and uniformed groups.

Said Mr Loh, who now draws \$1,600 every month: "No doubt it's not the corporate world, but people like us must be realistic and cannot expect to draw huge salaries."

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