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Sunday Star
SAYS

Let's be wiser about TVET

IF a parent can guide his child towards a white-collar job rather than blue-collar employment, chances are he would do exactly that.

However, things are seldom that simple. White-collar positions do not guarantee happiness.

What if the choice is between the child being an underperforming and dissatisfied white-collar worker, and him being highly competent in a rewarding blue-collar role? Most parents, if not all of them, would prefer the latter outcome.

For that matter, even our ideas on the contrast between white-collar and blue-collar occupations need to evolve.

"In the emerging Information Age, both the nature of work and

preparation for work are undergoing major changes, so that such black-and-white distinctions have become problematic," says Unesco.

In other words, it is time for us to have a more enlightened view on the importance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET).

We will soon get more help in that aspect because the Government is coming up with a masterplan on TVET.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced this on Wednesday. The Human Resources Ministry will manage the implementation of the masterplan with the support of several other ministries whose areas of responsibility

are closely linked to TVET.

The masterplan is part of a programme to transform TVET so that Malaysia's workforce will have the quality and skills that can sustain the country's competitiveness in a fast-changing world.

Najib said the transformation was necessary to face the new challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (also known as Industry 4.0) and the emergence of the digital economy.

There is already strong emphasis on TVET in pivotal government policies.

For example, education is a National Key Economic Area under the Economic Transformation Programme.

Part of the work on this front is to streamline TVET and promote the growth of TVET institutions. This way, our workforce will have high-value and specialised skills that will improve industrial innovation and productivity, which will be integral to Malaysia's transformation into a high-income nation by 2020.

One of the 10 shifts outlined in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) is the push to make the TVET pathway as attractive and valued as university education.

According to the 11th Malaysia Plan, 60% of the 1.5 million jobs that will be created between 2016 and 2020 will require TVET-related skills. This is why the five-year plan

includes initiatives to enable industry-led TVET to meet the demand for such graduates.

It appears that there will now be a more coordinated approach to boosting TVET in Malaysia and that the private sector will partner the Government in these efforts.

The transformation should extend to the changing of mindsets. TVET deserves to be seen in a different light; it should not be an option of last resort.

TVET is no less a foundation for successful careers and businesses than the academic pathway. We must understand that talent and interest flows in many directions and that a nation is not built by white-collar workers only.