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## Fears of a PhD bubble

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**LETTERS** and column on PhD targets refers. The career path for PhD holders in Malaysia is limited.

Before the MyBrain15 scheme, National Science Fellowship (NSF) and Yang di-Pertuan Agong scholarship were among the scholarships that one could apply for in Malaysia. The recipient of NSF scholarship has to register with the Public Service Department on graduation and needs to serve the government for three years.

If PSD does not have suitable jobs for the graduate, the contract will automatically lapse after a year. However, the scholarship recipient often has difficulty in applying for jobs with the PSD due to scarcity of suitable positions. Most of the available positions fall under Grade 41 and there are only limited vacancies for Grade 43. Currently, no Grade 51 is offered by PSD which is for PhD holders. If these PhDs cannot find a job locally, they might have to look overseas. This worsens our brain drain and wastes taxpayers' money.

Local universities have their own authorities to appoint tutors or lecturers. By browsing through their website, one will notice a number of tutors were sponsored to further their PhD studies and will become lecturers once they have completed it. Thus, existing positions will not be enough for MyBrain15 or NSF scholarship recipients to take up academic posts in the respective university upon graduation. Private universities also face similar situations where vacancies for lecturers are scarce compared to the number of PhD graduates.

We have limited investments by pharmaceutical companies to establish research facilities locally that will need the expertise from PhD holders. The lack of permanent jobs forces PhD holders to work as post-doctoral scientists (post-doc) in universities. Post-doc positions are contractual and only last for a year or two and subjected to renewal by the employer. Unlike permanent employees, post-doc employees have minimal benefits and receive no bonuses. This is not sustainable in the long term. I wonder why the authorities are still pushing for more PhD holders when the jobs are not there.

For the NSF scholarship, the applicant needs to go through an interview and only short-listed candidates are chosen. To ensure quality, I strongly suggest that MyBrain15 applicants are also screened at interviews.

There is no doubt that countries with PhD holders are more likely to succeed in the world market, however, the relevant authorities must answer a few questions before funding the MyBrain15 scheme.

What is the real value of PhDs to a country's development? Is there any justification that society should pay for the programme? What are the job opportunities for future PhD holders? Finally, I urge the relevant authorities to draft a mechanism on how to accommodate the large number of PhD holders and to prevent a PhD bubble.

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