

## Future Directions of the Ministry of Higher Education

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### Background

Following the cabinet reshuffle this year, the Ministry of Higher Education was established on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2004. The Ministry consists of Public Institutions of Higher Learning, Private Higher Educational Institutions, Polytechnics, Community Colleges and University Colleges. It was established to take care of higher education matters and operations; involving the transfer of the Department of Higher Education (JPT), Department of Private Education (JPS), Department of Technical Education (Polytechnics and Community Colleges), Public Institutions of Higher Learning, National Accreditation Board (LAN), National Higher Learning Funding Corporation (PTPTN) and Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman.

### The Core Values of the Ministry of Higher Education

The mission, vision and objectives of the Ministry of Higher Education are capable of fulfilling the country's aspirations, specifically in ensuring that education standards are continuously retained at high levels and in producing outstanding highly competitive citizens. In addition, Malaysia is set to become Asia's centre of educational excellence. In the drive to strengthen the education system, efforts will be focused on increasing the credibility of education system and promoting public confidence regarding the quality of Malaysian awards. This can be achieved through the Malaysian Qualification Framework that aims to ensure the curriculum and the education module meet the needs of the employment market as well as to inculcate core moral values among all graduates from public and private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

Higher education is the main force in the implementation of the nation's vision in generating knowledgeable and skilled citizens. Higher education should strive to develop critical, creative and innovative minds as well as to ensure the global competitiveness of the nation. Higher Education is also the main agent in configuring a fair socio-economic system that is based on k-economy as well as creating a society that is physically, emotionally, spiritually and intellectually ethical, respectable, competitive and well adjusted.



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In the context of the national education system, higher education spans from post secondary education to tertiary education. It comprises educational programmes at Community Colleges, Polytechnics, training institutes run by government and private agencies, public universities and private higher educational institutions.

Community Colleges, Polytechnics and training institutes run both by government and private agencies award certificates or diplomas. They also form an alternative

### HIGHLIGHTS

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route to tertiary education. Community colleges specialise in skilled training and re-training while Polytechnics emphasise semi-professional training. Tertiary education, on the other hand, awards diplomas and degrees and qualifications of equivalent value.

## **The Vision and Mission of the Ministry of Higher Education**

### **Vision**

Malaysian Higher Education will be a centre of excellence not only nationally but also internationally.

### **Mission**

The Ministry of Education provides opportunities and access to a trusted system of higher learning by offering superior quality educational programmes through international recognition and outstanding workforce who can fulfil both the national and global needs.

Through effective organisation, efficient delivery system and good governance, departments and agencies under the Ministry will synergise their workforce and ideas towards fulfilling the expectations of the stakeholders. Together with effective leadership, the nation's objectives will be fulfilled.

## **Issues and Challenges**

The higher education system in this country is being constantly reviewed to ensure that the country's vision and aspirations as the centre of excellence in global education is achieved. Meticulous and strategic planning will ensure that Malaysia is capable of remaining globally competitive. The planning requires careful considerations of internal as well as external factors related to the world of higher education. These factors include:

### **• Demand for Higher Education**

The opportunities for higher education are insufficient to cater for the increasing number of excellent students.

### **• Involvement of Private Sectors**

The responsibilities of providing higher education should not be solely placed on the shoulders of the government. The roles of private sectors through Private Higher Educational Institutions are significant in an effort to increase the participation of youth in higher education. Apart from limiting the outflow of our currency, these private institutions can contribute towards the country's economy by encouraging more foreign students to come and study in this country.

### **• Equal Participations of Bumiputras**

The involvement of Bumiputras in higher education is still significantly small. Presently, less than 40% of Bumiputra youth within the 17+ to the 23+ age cohorts have the opportunities to participate in educational programmes at various levels. Most of these opportunities are provided by Public Institutions of Higher Learning. However, the number of Bumiputras is still small in Private Higher Educational Institutions. The problem is intensified because most of these private institutions are located within main cities and this limits the access for Bumiputra students from certain locations, particularly from rural areas. The lack of economic equilibrium has been identified as the main reason for the instability of racial solidarity in this country.

### **• Demands for Science and Technology**

In preparation to become a developed country, we require more scientists and technology specialists. The rate of seven scientists for every 10,000 Malaysian population is considered low if compared to several of our neighbouring countries. Our strength in science and technology would be the main force for the creation of cutting edge knowledge apart from allowing us to manufacture strategic products. It is important to have an overall view of technical skills at every level according to the changing market trends. Training must include not only expertise in this field but also 'hands-on' training, together with significant level of creativity. Current development in technology particularly in Information and Communication Technology has altered educational and research methods and processes. Our specialist skills are also needed in order to manipulate, share and analyse information circulated daily via internet, satellite and other communication facilities, for the purpose of upgrading our knowledge and our application of that knowledge.

### **• Funding and Education Fees**

The emergence of numerous institutions of higher learning requires increasing funding from the government. With the intention of not burdening students and their parents, one strategic mechanism is required to ensure that each institute is able to generate its own supplementary income. Universities and polytechnics need to use their existing infrastructure and expert workforce for this purpose. A more accountable smart partnership between industry and management needs to be conducted.

Student fee is another issue that has caught society's attention. Astronomical funding of educational fees particularly in Private Higher Education Institutes is a big burden. In addition, the awards of scholarship and loans from certain agencies are limited.

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- **Autonomy and Accountability**

Presently, the world of education has autonomy in various aspects of management including financial management, employment, pension scheme and individual generation of funds to increase its efficiency. Local public universities also wish to obtain similar autonomy through corporatization. The current *Skim Saraan Baru* (SSB) is largely blamed for hampering efforts to competitively excel and obtain expert and highly qualified workforce. A separate and flexible scheme is proposed for the management of public institutions of higher learning. However, guidelines need to be drawn to ensure accountability at all levels of administration in these institutions.

- **Mastery of A Second Language**

Communicative skills are an added value to enable us to break through and capitalise on opportunities in the international market. Although Bahasa Malaysia is the official language, we need to be proficient in a second language, particularly the much needed English Language. This competence will provide increased confidence to allow our students to be competitive.

- **Internationalisation**

We are witnessing a global world without borders and boundaries. The dream of establishing a small global village has resulted in rapid freedom and mobility of international society. Steadily decreasing geographical and legal boundaries allow for a smooth mobility of society. Such environment is going to create social, cultural, economic, and religious and educational problems. Society in general and students in particular need to be prepared so they are able to take control of these complex challenges and competition.

- **Quality**

Quality is the most significant aspect to ensure excellence in developing a highly competitive culture. We need a quality education system to realise our vision to be the centre of excellence in the international scene. The quality of teaching staff, the learning environment, the evaluation process and facilities for students in all higher learning institutions need to be upgraded. The curriculum needs to be revised to fulfil the current needs of industry and employment market. Bench-marking methods which comply with international standards and recognitions ought to be carried out to guarantee that the product of our education system is accepted internationally. These require an administration that is efficient, forward thinking, transparent and proactive. Excellent managerial and leadership skills will be able to promote our education system to a level recognised by the international community.

- **Involvement of Other Government Agencies in the Education System**

The involvement of other government agencies add interesting colour to the system of higher education. Yet, these involvements have legal implications and repercussions in terms of recognition. In various aspects, their quality assessment cannot be carried out because their accountability to the Ministry of Education is vague.

## **The Directions of Malaysian Higher Education**

Based on the issues and the challenges facing the system of higher education in this country, several measures and strategies have been placed. These strategies act as future directions of higher education to ensure their objectives can be achieved. Among the directions set out by the Malaysian higher education are:

1. Access to higher education
2. Racial and social equality
3. Emphasis on Science and Technology (S&T)
4. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
5. Upgrading of post-graduates programmes
6. Inculcation of K-economy knowledge.
7. Graduating high quality students.
8. Encouragement of research and development of international standards.
9. Competitive funding mechanisms.
10. Inculcating the culture of quality

The shift towards the direction planned for Malaysian higher learning needs to take place so it will be parallel with the rapid tide of development in the country. This is due to the fact that education is a positive agent and mechanism of change. To achieve vision 2020 and to become a nation that has high technological skill, education must play a pivotal role. Nevertheless, this drastic shift and change will also have significant social implication on the structure of society in this country unless it is handled correctly. Education in this country is becoming increasingly liberal and it is inevitable that society has to make changes in their lifestyles, moving towards the creation of a knowledgeable society.

*(An extract of the speech delivered at the South Zone Undergraduate Colloquium on 21<sup>st</sup>. August 2004.)*

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