

# Managing Public Institutions of Higher Learning in Malaysia:

An Interview with Deputy Director General of the Department of Higher Education Management

**Reported by :** Aniswal Abd Ghani & Munir Shuib

**E**ducation, at all levels, has always been important to Malaysians. It has been the means to optimally utilize resources, i.e. natural materials and human related, towards socio-economic growth and development. It is in the pursuit of education that Malaysians, of all ages, have ventured within and abroad as temporary educational migrants. In the distant past, the Middle-east, India and England may have been the traditional destinations abroad. Modern Malaysians are jet-setters carrying on this pursuit and academic sojourns in America, Japan, Russia to name a few, however brief, have been and still are domains of the Malaysian intelligentsia.

We now find ourselves in an enviable position. We have honed and expanded our educational resources within the country. Higher education in Malaysia is accessible to every Malaysian regardless of age and socio-economic background. The basic requirement for admission into undergraduate programmes has always been the required passes at the Sijil Tinggi Peperiksaan Malaysia (STPM), the Malaysian equivalent of the Higher School Certificate or the British A-Levels. Confirmed admission into public universities ensures some form of financial support, either through full scholarships or student loans. All that is required is that recipients continuously maintain high academic standards throughout their study.

The traditional cohort of university undergraduates is still school-leavers who make up the bulk of enrolled full-time undergraduates. Malaysian public universities, have also for a long time now, entertained mature students both in their undergraduate and postgraduate programmes as full-time or part-time students. Universiti Sains Malaysia, for example through its School of Distance Education, offers part-time undergraduate programmes through distance education. The

School's programme of studies, similar to that of the British Open University, has enabled many Malaysians for nearly three decades now, to improve themselves, their academic qualifications and their socio-economic prospects, particularly pertaining to jobs mobility.

Age has never been a barrier to academia and this is further highlighted from the academic year 2005/2006 when public universities specifically open their doors to the *warga emas*. Malaysians who have retired from their full-time jobs, i.e. 56 years and above are eligible and can now pursue undergraduate programmes. Their years of work experience in related fields are taken into account in place of the basic academic requirements for admission.

Malaysians currently can choose from 18 public institutions of higher learning, the IPTAs and numerous other private

*Continued on page 8*

## HIGHLIGHTS

Enhancing Academic Administrators' Professionalism through the Application of Development Centre .....	2
Generic Skills of Malaysian University Students .....	5
Higher Education in Malaysia and Australia 2005: a Regional Research Forum on Higher Education .....	7
National Conference on Skills and Competencies in Education 2005 .....	9
New Publications .....	10
Announcement .....	11

institutions of higher learning, the IPTSs. Malaysians can choose to study fully within the country or abroad. There are academic programmes, for example twinning and exchange, which can also be pursued in parts, in the country and abroad, as well as cross-county programmes. This wealth of resources in academia is now placed under the Department of Higher Education Management of the Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia).

The Department of Higher Education Management is the conduit towards making the country the centre of excellence in education and research in the region and in due course, in the world. We have the resources and we want to optimise and share them. The brief given to the department is to see to the strategic plan, the roadmap for Higher Education in the country. Ultimately the department is to enforce these plans and strategies and monitor them. As its name indicates, the Ministry of Higher Education deals only with Higher Education and this pertains to all post secondary school education, from diplomas to PhDs. The Ministry, and thus the Department has under its wings polytechnics, community colleges and university colleges. There is a wealth of knowledge and skills to manage and disseminate.

The exciting and challenging task of heading and managing all the public universities has been given to Yang Berbahagia Datuk Prof. Mohd Yusof bin Kasim. He is the recently appointed Deputy Director General who deals solely with public universities. There is another Deputy Director General who deals solely with private universities. Datuk Prof. Mohd Yusof has been given two years, 'from the 1 April 2005 on secondment', to get the roadmap in place and going. Jobs mobility, or rather responsibility mobility is not new to Datuk Prof. Mohd Yusof. He was with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, (UKM), and in fact in some ways he still is, as he has never resigned nor has his post been terminated. He has been in various capacities: lecturer, researcher, administrator and consultant with UKM's Faculty of Economics, Centre for Research Management and Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS), for 23 years. He was then seconded to the University of Sabah Malaysia to fill in a much-needed

position in the newly set up university. He was their economics lecturer and the International Corporate Director. In the latter position, he brought in 150 foreign students to study in the university. It was not that much later that he was directed to be part of MTEN, the government's economic think tank. His area of academic expertise, not surprisingly is regional economics and globalisation. Then of course, came this current responsibility.

The Department of the Higher Education Management has three main sections: governance, academic development and student admissions. It is responsible for the training of manpower: academics

programmes have to be relevant to the needs of international markets. Malaysia wants to continue being economically vibrant and competitive and in that context, Malaysian national standards equate international standards. The government sees Malaysia as a global player in the service sector furnishing global employment needs. Thus in meeting this global employment needs and in ensuring that our graduates, particularly our science and technology graduates, are employable wherever they choose to work, all science and mathematics programmes in the public Malaysian universities are to be taught in English from the academic year 2005/2006 onwards. According to

**Academic programmes have to be relevant to the needs of international markets. Malaysia wants to continue being economically vibrant and competitive and in that context, Malaysian national standards equate international standards.**

and non-academics, the courses offered by the respective higher institutions and the setting up of new faculties as well as new universities. It determines the policy for student admissions into the universities as well as into the matriculation programmes offered by the universities.

There are three units under governance. The first deals with monitoring the performance of the academic institutions under the Ministry. The second sees to coordinating its various resources, i.e. manpower and institutions and, the third deals with the overall management of all these resources. In brief, the first task of the Department is to see to the development and achievement of all the institutions of higher learning in the country.

The section that deals with academic development is responsible for all the academic programmes offered. It has to ensure that all programmes offered are of international standards. Academic

Datuk Prof. Mohd Yusof, 'the other task of the department is to re-evaluate and assess the branding of programmes and resources as well as developing clusters in an exercise of the economies of scale, synergising and adding value to existing resources.' Optimal use of resources and opportunity cost appear to be the modus operandi of the Department of Higher Education Management.

In short, the Department's role is to work out an action plan for higher education. This requires that all key players are made to be well versed with their respective roles. In this respect, Datuk Prof. Mohd Yusof, under the Director General of the Department of Higher Education Management, works closely with the other Deputy Director General. The department is working on and formulating a strategic plan and the relevant roadmap for individual players. This roadmap is also going to encourage others to become temporary educational migrants in Malaysia: academic sojourns and homestay in Malaysia.