

Higher Education in Malaysia and Australia 2005: a Regional Research Forum on Higher Education

Professor Morshidi Sirat, Director, IPPTN and Professor Ambigapathy Pandian, Associate Research Fellow, IPPTN were invited to present their working papers at the inaugural Malaysia-Australia Higher Education Forum held at the University of Wollongong, Australia, 2-4th November 2005. The two-day forum, convened by Associate Professor Peter Kell, brought together academics and experts in higher education in Malaysia and Australia at the University of Wollongong, Australia to deliberate current higher education situation and chart future research directions and collaboration. The intended outcomes of this forum were to:

- Continue a regional engagement on issues in higher education.
- Develop a publication to document the forum.
- Establish a formal research link between participants in higher education in the Asia Pacific.

At this forum it was decided that IPPTN will organise the *Malaysia-Australia Higher Education Forum 2006* in Penang, Malaysia in November 2006. The theme for the forthcoming conference is *Higher Education in the Asia Pacific and Networked Society* and the focus for deliberations are as follows:

- Mathematics Education bilateral studies in the teaching of Science, mathematics and the language interface.
- The Concept of knowledge communities and interconnected networks and communications. What does it really mean for the academy?

- Interconnected Knowledge and Research: Research policy and directions and the dilemmas for Australia Malaysia and other partners in the Asia Pacific.
- Connecting with the Environment: Higher Education, the environment and sustaining sustainability?
- Networking and linking to broader knowledge community: Links of Lifelong Learning, “second chance” learning in adult education.
- Maintaining the Standard of Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Quality assurance of transnational education.
- Interconnecting global communities: ICT and emerging technologies of learning.
- Interconnections and global diversity: Intercultural implications emerging from internationalisation for teaching/research.
- Governance and leadership higher education.
- Professionalism in teaching and leadership.
- Inclusion in Higher Education: Gender and inclusion in higher education research in the Asia Pacific.
- Networks, funding, resourcing and the governance of Higher Education in the Asia Pacific: Private exchange or public goods? Public corporation of private enterprises?



Participants of
Malaysia - Australia
HE Forum 2005

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

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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.