

## Contents

**Potential Marketability of Graduates from Bachelor of Production Operations Management (Hons), Universiti Utara Malaysia**

Noor Hidayah Abu  
Norani Nordin &  
Kamaruddin Redzuan ... 3

**The Cultivation of Skills through the Study of Philosophy**

Zailan Moris ... 7

**Tun Dr. Mahathir's Vision 2020 Universities: Views from the Humanities**

Morshidi Sirat & Munir Shuib ... 10

**International Higher Education Policy Research & Management Forum 2006**

... 12

**Futures of Higher Education in Malaysia Workshop**

... 14

**Higher Education Research Monograph Series:**

**Industrial Training Practices in Malaysian Undergraduate Engineering Programme**

... 15

## Facilitating the Mission and Vision of the Ministry of Higher Education

Y. Bhg. Dato' Dr. Zulkefli A. Hassan was appointed as the Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education in December 2005. He is the second person to hold the post following the inception of the ministry in 2004.

In this interview with IPPTN, Zulkefli talks about his roles in facilitating the mission and vision of the Ministry of Higher Education and his views about higher education today.

**Munir Shuib &  
Shukran Abd Rahman**

In the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has been allocated over RM18 billion to provide better facilities and promote quality at the various universities and colleges in Malaysia. This sum is significantly higher than that was provided under the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

Higher allocation naturally means higher expectations. As the chief secretary, Zulkefli is entrusted with a huge responsibility in the ministry to help ensure that returns commensurate with the heavy investment placed by the government. His responsibility is shared by his two deputies, Y. Bhg. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Taib Hashim, who is in charge of planning and development, and Y. Bhg. Datin Rodiah Meor Sulaiman, who is in charge of governance.

An officer with many hats, Zulkefli's major roles include to oversee the implementation of all policies and decisions pertaining to higher education in the country. He also acts as a kind of 'controlling officer' for the ministry. In this role he is empowered to solve financial matters such as the spending of allocation and procurement for services and ensures that building constructions are carried out in accordance with the Treasury's instructions and government approval.

Zulkefli's roles are not restricted to governance, but also encompass capacity building in higher education. Through his Planning and Development Division, Zulkefli is entrusted to undertake studies which have strategic and national



interests. One of the studies which his team has undertaken concerns the transformation of higher education. The study examines various aspects of higher education including access, governance, research and development and linkages between tertiary education and primary and secondary education.

In addition to capacity building, he acts as the coordinator for replies and responses to questions raised by honourable members of parliament concerning higher education. To do this effectively, he requires full support from universities and all departments in MOHE. Information

requested from these parties must reach him in time to allow him to prepare the required responses.

Another equally important task is to oversee the restructuring of community colleges, which he considers to be the hub of life-long learning. According to Zulkefli, currently there are thirty four community colleges throughout the country. Another twenty five are to be built in the next five years. In line with the decision of the National Implementation Task Force, which is chaired by the Hon. Prime Minister and as part of a rebranding strategy, the ministry has decided to allow community colleges to offer courses at diploma level starting from 2007. The goal is to provide greater opportunities to school leavers, especially for those who underperformed at school levels, to enhance their knowledge and skills. Such a decision, he emphasizes, would not lead to a duplication of the roles of the polytechnics, even though the latter also offer courses at advanced diploma level for the fields of study offered by the two types of tertiary institutions differ. Furthermore, unlike community colleges, higher achievers from the polytechnics would have greater opportunities to gain admissions into universities. The proviso, needless to say, is that they meet the minimum threshold of the admission requirements. This decision, regarding community colleges, is also in line with the government's target to increase access to higher education for those aged between seventeen and twenty three years old. Currently, only 29% of those in that cohort have access to higher education. By the year 2010, however, the government expects the percentage of enrolment to increase by 40%. The increase, Zulkefli points out, is vital for Malaysia. As he puts it "for Malaysia to be a developed country in 2020, the percentage of the 17 – 23 cohort having access to higher education must be comparable to other countries in the world". However, he confesses that the percentage increase is a major challenge as it is to be undertaken against the backdrop of increasing population.

In addition to access to higher education, the ministry has devised numerous plans and strategies to transform higher education in Malaysia. One of them is to enrich the research culture and enhance its qualities among Malaysian academe through the provision of various research grants, including those offered by other ministries such as the priority research under MOSTI, the Science Fund, and the Techno Fund. MOHE itself has been allocated a sum of RM 0.2 billion for universities to conduct fundamental research and this allocation will be duly increased at the earliest opportunity.

Another strategy is to ensure the competitiveness of Malaysian higher education institutions in the world. To achieve this, Zulkefli says that "by 2020, Malaysia is expected to have two universities which are ranked in the top 200 in the world; one of which must be in the top 50".

In addition, universities are expected to increase their international postgraduate student enrolment. However, in order to attract international students to study here, the quality of teaching, research, and facilities in the institutions must be improved. Also, efforts must be made to attract the best faculties to serve the universities, both in the government as well as in the private sector. In this connection, he reports that the ministry has agreed to allow faster promotion for academics within the civil service structure. The ministry is also working on a proposal to review the starting salary for academics with PhDs as well as encouraging the more senior lecturers to continue serving beyond the current mandatory retirement age of 56 years.

To further improve the quality of higher education in Malaysia, MOHE has established an academy to train higher level managers and academic staff of higher educational institutions to efficiently and effectively handle higher education-related tasks. This training institution, the Academy for Leadership in Higher Education or Akademi Kepimpinan Pengajian Tinggi (AKEPT), will have a permanent campus at Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. The academy will provide, among others, leadership training for academics in order to prepare them for leadership and managerial roles at higher learning institutions. It will also provide training to improve academics' competencies in teaching and learning.

The huge investment made by the government on higher education should bring about desirable returns in the form of competent human capital not just in terms of competent academics but also competent graduates. For Zulkefli, it is vital for universities to edify university students with desired competencies, so as to make them highly employable graduates. He underlines, "Only with vast knowledge, up-to-date skills, proficient abilities, and positive characteristics, could graduates competently fare in the world of work".

MOHE and the private sector, in particular the industry, always maintain close ties in order to produce employable graduates whose competencies commensurate with job demands. Such close ties, according to Zulkefli, have paved ways to "a judicious formation of university curriculum which prepare students for the job market, making them more relevant in the increasingly changing world of work".

There is no denying that numerous efforts have been made and will still have to be made by MOHE to enhance the quality and the image of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. But with the forward looking and vastly experience chief secretary and his team supporting and facilitating MOHE's mission and vision, there is little doubt that Malaysia will soon be transformed into a world class regional higher education hub.