UNIMAS'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN (PSPTN) 2007-2010

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Introduction

The National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) is an initiative from the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), to develop the quality of human capital and to make Malaysia a hub of excellence in higher education regionally and internationally (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). In August 27, 2007 PSPTN was launched by the then Prime Minister, YAB Dato' Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi. PSPTN outlined four phases of development: viz, Phase 1: Laying the Foundation in 2007-2010, followed by Phase 2: Strengthening and Enhancement (2011-2015), then Phase 3: Excellence (2016-2020) and finally Phase 4: Glory and Sustainability that should begin beyond the year 2020.

In 2008, Action Plan for Phase 1 (2007-2010) was launched and outlined an extensive programme that will be executed in the next several years. The role of MoHE was as a mentor and facilitator for higher education institutions as well as a policy maker and regulator for higher education in Malaysia. To achieve this, the Ministry set up a Program Management Office (PMO) to become the secretariat for PSPTN implementation. PMO's task is to record the implementation of PSPTN programmes and report to the relevant authorities.

At institutional level, to facilitate communication between PMO and UNIMAS, MoHE stipulated that a liaison officer, iPMO officer (institutional PMO), must be appointed. In view of the importance of the role of iPMO, UNIMAS placed the iPMO office under the Quality Assurance Division (QAD). QAD has been responsible for the transformation of UNIMAS through four core activities, namely 1) strategic planning and implementing, 2) benchmarking and standardising, 3) strengthening the internal processes and 4) leveraging on ICT. The iPMO is fully supported by the head of QAD, officers and staff of the division. By reinforcing the iPMO with the appropriate resources and support, UNIMAS had handled the PSPTN agenda in a systematic and appropriate manner from the onset.

Focus on Knowledge Management

In response to the PSPTN Action Plan Phase 1 2007-2010, all public higher education institutions were instructed to formulate their activities prepared in the PSPTN agenda. UNIMAS held a brainstorming session with *Majlis Dekan,* consisting of all the deans of faculty, directors of institutes/centers and heads of divisions, on 29 November until 1 December 2007. The outcome of the session was the formulation of the UNIMAS Action Plan 2008-2010. The Plan included commitments in the form of activities towards supporting three Critical Agenda Projects (CAPs) in the PSPTN which are Learning and Teaching, Research & Development and Academia. In the consequent years, QAD was tasked with coordinating, executing and reporting the successful implementations of all these activities.

Other than the CAPS agenda, MoHE started executing several PSPTN projects that involved institutions like UNIMAS. Amongst them were embedding the soft skills elements (popularly known as LOKI) in programme curriculum, auditing institutions against the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA, a programme called Academic Performance Audit, APA), submitting of institutional data twice a year to MoHE (a programme called MyMohes), rating of teaching-learning quality of institutions (a programme called SETARA) and achieving a high research standard using the RU Tool (later known as MyRA). In all of these projects, several units directly or indirectly under MoHE served as the programme secretariat and amongst them are agencies such as HEI Excellence Planning Division (BPKI), Department of Higher Education (JPT), Planning and Research Division (BPP) and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

The commencement of PSPTN introduced several new cultures in institutions like UNIMAS. In responding to all the above programmes, amongst the first strategy by UNIMAS was to improve the management of its record and quality of its databases. QAD began setting up the *Pasukan Petugas* (task force) MyMohes to ensure that all databases capture the required data needed by the various PSPTN projects. Several workshops were conducted to analyse the gap between data needed by stakeholders and that available in UNIMAS databases. In the following years UNIMAS successfully improved the quality of its databases, created new entry fields in the existing applications, set up data administrators to access the systems, integrated a few application systems, created several new ones and launched a high tech business intelligence application system. Another positive outcome worthy of mention is the integration

of data from the research management, consultancy and postgraduate offices into a single application system called "Integrated Research Information System (iRIS)". MoHE had successfully created a vital need for all institutions to improve their respective data recording system, ICT technologies and staff responsibilities in collecting useful records.

UNIMAS's Responses to the PSPTN Projects

On the onset, the UNIMAS Management appointed the head of QAD as coordinator to the MyMohes project. UNIMAS aimed to focus on creating a knowledge management system that is accurate, verifiable and timely as well as upgrading the capability of databases and competency of ICT staff. Figure 1 shows the performance of UNIMAS MyMohes rating carried out by the MyMohes secretariat. There are two main impacts of the MyMohes project. First, UNIMAS successfully captured relevant data fields for modules on staff, students, R&DC and general information. Second, UNIMAS can guarantee the quality of all those data. The way forward will be to create a culture that allows real time data to be captured easily.

In the early years of executing PSPTN, the PMO Office conducted numerous workshops and activities related to the CAPs and its KPIs. Also, there were annual best practice sharing sessions, peer-review and self-audit. UNIMAS Management decided that all these CAPs and their KPIs must be given due attention and the targets must be achieved. In parallel to the numerous KPIs in the CAPs, MQA was also implementing the APA project and there were several KPIs related to the Benchmarked and Enhanced Standards stipulated in COPIA. In addition, the use of the RU Tools to measure research outputs contained a substantial number of KPIs that need to be achieved in order to earn the RU marks. All these three projects required an extensive workforce and proper coordination in UNIMAS. The UNIMAS Management ordered QAD to design a mechanism to address the diverse needs of these KPIs from the three PSPTN projects mentioned above. QAD took the lead in the following *Majlis Dekan* brainstorming on 16-18 January 2009. Among the agenda of discussions were 1) SWOT analysis, 2) strategies for CAPs and 3) the Academic Performance Audit (APA).

In January 2010, QAD presented a concept paper for the UNIMAS BSC Project to the UNIMAS Management. Figure 2 shows the fundamental elements in UNIMAS BSC project. The project was designed based on the performance management theory derived from the book "Balanced Scorecard" by Norton and Kaplan (Kaplan et al., 1996). After getting the mandate to implement the project, QAD started the long process of developing, baseline setting, KPI identifying, training, reporting, operating, executing and monitoring until the successful completion of the project. The UNIMAS BSC project took more than a year to complete. Finally, in the *Majlis Dekan* on June 19 to 22, 2010, a progress report of the UNIMAS

BSC project was presented and feedbacks from the Deans were received. Most importantly, a consensus was reached by the *Majlis Dekan* to implement the UNIMAS BSC for the first cycle 2011-2012. Throughout the same period, the Center for ICT & Services (CICTS) UNIMAS had successfully developed an online application system "Performance Management System" or *PerforMS*, which supports the implementation of the UNIMAS BSC. The first cycle of UNIMAS BSC successfully ended in December 2012 and the present cycle for 2013-2014 had already started. The way forward for UNIMAS BSC will be to consolidate the KPIs with the operating budget and resources, similar to the needs of the paradigm shift towards an outcome based budgeting.
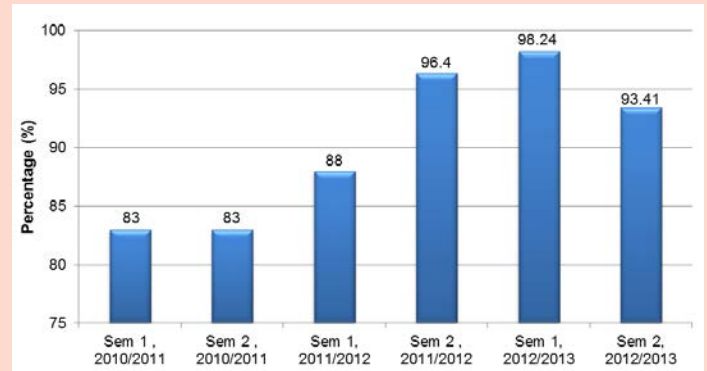

Figure 1: UNIMAS's Performance in MyMohes project

Figure 2: The fundamental elements in UNIMAS BSC project

With the establishment of the UNIMAS BSC and PerforMS, UNIMAS had laid down a comprehensive system of performance measurement. It captured the commitments by the various faculties, institutes, centers and divisions (FICD) towards the achievement of UNIMAS's KPIs.

PerforMS also allowed the monitoring of activities by the use of the red, yellow and green traffic light system. Most significantly, UNIMAS is able to produce the Faculty Scorecard annually and trigger the competitive culture amongst faculties. In the spirit of laying down the foundation for Phase 1 PSPTN, UNIMAS pride itself in having the UNIMAS BSC and PerforMS.

The 2007-2010 Phase 1 PSPTN was a very demanding period for UNIMAS. With all the PSPTN projects (MyMOHES, CAPs, APA, RU Tool, etc) occurring simultaneously, it required serious coordination and teamwork. QAD worked closely with all FICD in UNIMAS. Without the professionalism, openness and high commitment of all UNIMAS staff, the implementations of all these PSPTN projects would not have been a success. As a result of these healthy collaborations, the *Majlis Dekan* had acknowledged four UNIMAS core values: viz Perseverance, Innovative, Collegiality and Sincerity. Another spin-off effect from the focus on these PSPTN projects is that UNIMAS managed to increase the level of communication, interactions, collaborations and discussions amongst the various FICD. The spirit of cooperation still prevails today in the form of various strategic programmes called Q-ReServis, COPIA-2, GradPhD, Academic benchmarking and many more. Table 1 shows the number of projects implemented in 2012 and the number that will be implemented in 2013. The way forward will be to increase such team spirit and empower the various FICD to contrive more strategic initiatives by themselves.

TABLE 1 Total number of strategic projects in 2012 and 2013

Year 2012	No.
Number of projects completed	5
Number of projects continued to 2013	7
Number of yearly routine projects	**5**
Number of projects not implemented	1
Year 2013	**No.**
Number of projects continued from 2012	**7**
Number of yearly routine projects	5
Number of new projects started in 2013	8

Despite the grueling pressures in responding to the PSPTN projects, UNIMAS also took other initiatives to lay a solid foundation before the beginning of Phase 2. The most significant ones were developing the "e-Course Outline" that contain the LOKI elements, "e-Prestasi" for staff annual evaluation, "e-Voting" for selection of student representatives, "InMinds" as a business intelligent application and UNIMAS Customer Satisfaction Online (UNIMAS CSO) as a mean to capture and response to student issues. Other initiatives included the formation of Innovative and Creative Circles (ICC), quality environment practice (5S) and the scope expansion of the MS ISO certification. There are few more, like quality cost, single point data entry and one-stop center, yet to be launched in due time.

Way Forward for UNIMAS

There are high expectations for UNIMAS to dramatically improve its performance in Phase 2 PSPTN. The present momentum is still great, the buying-in by staff is improving and the spirits are high. The main focus presently is to enhance and strengthen all those new initiatives and strategic projects with the ultimate aim to transform UNIMAS towards an excellent institution. With the foundations already laid successfully, UNIMAS is in a position to become one of the premiere universities in the region in the next decade.

References

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