### ARTICLES FOR UTM SENATE MEMBERS

**“APEX University”**

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APEX University: Is it the Malaysian Way Forward?

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Abstract—Malaysia is on the road for a new education revolution. The aspiration is to put the Malaysian education on the global map by transforming the tertiary education into a center of academic excellence. Timeframe: 2010. Its vision: regional center for higher education learning that focuses on finance and banking, biotechnology, information and communication technology (ICT) multimedia content development, advanced manufacturing and industrial design. End result: human capital with first class mentality. First introduced by Mahathir Mohamad in 1991, Vision 2020 is developed further by Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with the notion of Malaysian Nobel Laureates and Malaysia as the education hub for international scholars by 2057. With that in mind, the National Higher Education Action Plan (NHEAP) was launched in 2007 with five critical agendas accompanied by five pillars to strengthen all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Prior to that, four research universities (RU) were established in 2006 in a move to highlight the importance of research in Malaysian Academia. An APEX (Accelerated Programme for Excellence) University was further created in 2008, hoped to be Malaysian’s first world class university. With this Malaysia hopes to bump its universities up to the Top 100 in THE-QS world university ranking (THE-QS) by 2010. Due to rapid changes in the Malaysian education landscape, not to mention the high expectation posed on the academia, issues and complications may arise as Malaysia is venturing forward into shifting the mindset of not only Malaysians but also the world that Malaysia too has an equal footing in the global education arena. The challenges faced should be anticipated prior to APEX implementation and strategies should be put in place in line with problem identification. The impact this education revolution should be carefully weighed and studied especially the foreseeable gap of education quality and funding allocation in APEX, research and other local HEIs. The success of this new aspiration requires commitment, effort, collaboration and cooperation from all, not only HEIs and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) but also encompassing the government and corporate sectors.

Keywords—APEX University; Malaysia; world class mentality; world class university; higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

All The significant growth in knowledge-intensive sectors (Andersson, 2008), inspires Malaysia to prepare itself into knowledge-based economy by upgrading four public universities to research university (RU) status under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP). An APEX University (AU) was further introduced in 2008 with Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) being chosen as the trailblazer in this new education revolution. The development of AU aims to fulfill Malaysia’s thirst to having a world class university. It is expected by 2010 USM will make a giant leap from its current rank at 313 (THE-QS, 2008) to be among the top 100 (NHEAP, 2007) and Malaysia to attract 100,000 overseas students (Najib, 2006).

NHEAP (2007) defines AU to be the centre of academic distinction, headed by visionary, motivated and committed leaders, comprising of talented and renowned academicians, filled with local and international students who possess a high standard of academic excellence, and equipped with state-of-the-art facilities. The aim is to become a melting pot that combines the best education while nourishing the minds of scholars from a diverse background (Michael, 2008).

Supporting the AU are RUs which currently consists of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) which also plays an important role in contributing towards education excellence in Malaysia. The establishment of RUs is to increase: research, development and commercialisation activities; the number of post-graduate and post-doctoral graduates; the number of academicians with PhD; number of international students; solid centres of excellence; and improved university ranking in THE-QS (http://jpt.mohe.gov.my/menuipt.php). It is expected that a total of six RUs will be established by 2020.

The role of universities and the academia have shifted. Other than the traditional role of teaching and learning, learning institutions have been added the responsibility of producing new knowledge in the forms of research and publications. Although this has been common practice in universities in the West, it is just being given emphasis recently in Malaysia. Knowledge sharing and dissemination is no longer confined to the four walls of the classroom but must be spread across the globe. The advent of the internet has made the process of knowledge sharing faster than it has ever been.

The success of this huge undertaking lies in the ability of all parties involved in working together in achieving a
common goal. Musa (2007) says that to be successful, one must be competitive, if you are not successful, then you must not be competitive. Malaysia may not have all the competitive advantages as to other world-class universities, but success may be achieved if Malaysia distinguishes itself in certain areas which are recognisable.

This paper looks into Malaysian’s strategy to educational glory, the APEX University. Defined as Malaysia’s gateway to higher education success, the positive impact that APEX may (or may not bring) is crucial towards the continuation of this very ambitious and not to mention costly project. This revolution is hoped to transform Malaysia’s tertiary education landscape and refocus the Malaysian economy into knowledge economy. Changes to the Higher Education system and its impact must be anticipated in order to MOHE to not only produce world-class capital, but also the supporting measures, the availability of working positions to accommodate these future graduates.

II. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

A. Going for Sustainability

USM looks to the Blue Ocean Strategy (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005) in positioning itself as a world-class university. To distinguish itself, USM will not benchmark themselves against other world-class universities but instead, it aims to redefine itself as a sustainable university, focusing towards meeting global challenges (USM, 2008). It stands by the Four Pillars of Education (Delors, 1996) of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. What USM plans to do is, to eliminate the obsolete, reduce the insignificant, raise the necessary and create essentials of the best Malaysian tertiary education (USM, 2008).

USM’s mode to success is to bring in “towering professors” to stimulate its research arena, recruit high quality staff and create fellowships and chairs in the move to attract the most outstanding brains in the world. Three simple strategies for human capital: getting the best international scholars, nurturing and growing local potentials, and retaining and grooming existing academicians. Increase in international collaboration and corporate linkages are aimed to increase competency and reduce dependency on government funding. Traditional examination based syllabus and monologue lectures are reduced in favour of applicable knowledge and research focus while curriculum is emphasised on nurturing student’s skills and competencies. Non-traditional entry will be created to attract talented students especially those in arts and sports.

As a university that focuses on sustainability, research and development will be aimed in health biotechnology, molecular medicine, fundamental research, biodiversity and environment and engineering research areas. The concentration areas will be focusing on future global and universal aspirations as well as meeting the Millennium Development Goals as outlined by the United Nations which is to; eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

B. Realizing the dream

What has been achieved so far? According to Radin (2009) international students’ enrolment is at 70,000 students, chairs on Malay studies have been established at Hankuk Foreign Studies University, (South Korea) Leiden University (Netherlands) and University of Wellington (New Zealand), and several international collaborations have been set up like the Malay-Japan University Centre (MJUC), Malay-France University Centre (MFUC) and Malay-Japan International University Technology (MJIUT).

As for the AU, USM located eight different transformation areas; (1) nurturing and learning; (2) research innovation; (3) services and external activities; (4) students and alumni services; (5) postgraduate studies; (6) concentration of talent; (7) resources; and (8) supportive governance. It currently boasts that it has reached world class standing in medical biotechnology, ecological drainage technology, vector control, anti-infective drug research and aquaculture research. Unfortunately, USM’s achilles heel is its lack of sharing the knowledge via publications, patents/ commercialisation, technology transfer, impact on policy/ consultancies, awards and recognition. As Jusoff (2009) lamented, the Malaysian universities researchers’ goal should be for high impact journal publications, and that is what actually has not yet been successfully achieved. That quite explains the not-so-stellar performance in THE-QS 2008 world university ranking.

It would be unfair to demand what results have the AU shown as it has only been in operation for less than one year. As Ramaprasad (2009) quantifies four dimensions in a world class university system; scope, aspiration, function and focus. It seems that USM has defined its scope (a sustainable university), aspiration (becoming a world class university), function (as an AU) and focus (the four pillars of education). The only quantifiable and fast result that will be seen is the THE-QS ranking for USM in 2009.

And to speed up the transformation process, in 2007 all RUs received RM50 million each in research funding to stimulate research activities. The significance of all that money is not only to boost research and development activities, but also to increase commercialisation of research products as well as the increase in number of writing and publications produced. For the AU, another additional RM830 million is slotted to be disbursed in the Ninth and Tenth Malaysia Plan in the effort to upgrade the university’s facilities as well as funding for research.

C. Issues and Concerns

As with any change, there are implications. With this new thought comes a paradigm shift. That Malaysians too can be the movers and shakers in education. However, there are several issues and concerns that need to be addressed if Malaysia is to pave its way into the path of educational glory. Firstly, Malaysia wants its universities to be in Top 100 THE-QS, it presumed that the AU or one of the RUs will achieve that aim. Unfortunately, the ranks is scaled
according to the qualifications outlined by THE-QS and in this case, there will always be other universities which will have more resources, money, talent and academicians. As Kim and Mauborgne (2005) say, the only way to beat the competition is to stop trying to beat the competition. And since USM had stated that it follows the Blue Ocean Strategy, why don’t USM create a new way of excellence, which means the Malaysian universities do not need to follow THE-QS requirements for university ranking. Why not create a new system that bypasses the ranking or makes the ranking irrelevant?

Knowing the huge scale of changes that are being implemented as well as those which will be put in place when the time comes, a system of monitoring and control must be implemented to ensure the success of the overall strategy and the attainment of the final goal, distinguishing Malaysia as the new global education centre. As Rafiah comments on Malaysia’s education revolution during an interview, having a grand plan is one thing; implementing it is another. How the plan is to be implemented must be addressed and monitored (Shukran, 2007). A system of check and balance must be put in place to ensure that the money spent by the government on these development are translated into results, the results that will enhance Malaysia’s human capital as well as enhance Malaysia’s standing in the education arena.

Another issue is the change in the Malaysian educational landscape. Once the idea lifts off and the dream of Malaysia becoming an education hub becomes reality, there will be an increase in the number of international students and “towering professors” coming into the country. The main concern is, are the Malaysian academia ready? Malaysians are notoriously known to be late, so much so that the habit has been coined as keeping the Malaysian time which means that, keeping by the clock is pointless as the Malaysian time would be somewhere in between of 15 minutes to one hour later. A study has to be conducted on the feasibility of AU as well as what are the roles of RUs have to play in accentuating Malaysia’s position as a new education hub. There will be an increase in the number of international students and “towering professors” coming into the country. The main concern is, are the Malaysian academia ready? Malaysians are notoriously known to be late, so much so that the habit has been coined as keeping the Malaysian time which means that, keeping by the clock is pointless as the Malaysian time would be somewhere in between of 15 minutes to one hour later. A study has to be conducted on the feasibility of AU as well as what are the roles of RUs have to play in accentuating Malaysia’s position as a new education hub. This is to identify what similarities and differences arise between Malaysian academia and other world-class universities. This is to identify what similarities and differences arise between Malaysian academia and other world-class universities. In this way, similarities can be enhanced and differences minimised to improve our working cultures together.

Michael (2008) identifies that universities are generally divided into two: those who concentrates on academic excellence and discovery and those who provides education access to all, which AU seems to be leaning on the former. The question arises on what happens to those who are not accepted to USM, will they then be subjected to a second rate education by not-so-towering professors of non-APEX Malaysian universities? This could lead to a gap in the quality of education received by HEI students as those who can reap the benefits of being accepted in an AU would certainly enjoy the extra perks as compared to those who enrolled in other universities (Michael, 2008). Studies should be made to ascertain whether the gaps exist and what are the perception on graduates from AU, RU and other local universities. If there are significant gaps, therefore corrective measures should be taken to ensure that graduates from other than AU are given equal opportunity from employers.

III. CONCLUSION

If Malaysia wants to develop academic and institutional excellence as proposed in NHEAP, the approach to a world class university standard should not be focused on one university only, but the cumulative growth and effort of all Malaysian universities. One might wonder, as we are now nearing the end of 2009, will the remaining period prior to the end of 2010 be enough for Malaysia to achieve the oh-so-many targets that it wishes to achieve.

The path to success is never easy. It is a long and winded road accompanied with many a failed attempts and discouragement. But if Thomas Edison had to try a 1000 light bulbs in order to make the perfect one and Isaac Newton had to see an apple fall from a tree to discover the law of gravity, this is itself shows that the process of discovery and success is identified in different ways. To succeed one must persevere in ones dream. And in this scenario, maybe USM should define its own success or world class definition in its own way rather than positioning itself along with the criteria outlined in THE-QS. It could be the way to Malaysia’s world class university is to redefine the concept of university or information and knowledge dissemination. At the end of the day, being at the apex also means that the only way to go forward is the way down.

Further studies have to be conducted on the growth of USM since it has been declared as AU. What changes have been implemented, and how did it affect the university’s overall position. Other than that, more studies should be done on the feasibility of AU as well as what are the roles that RUs have to play in accentuating Malaysia’s position as an education hub.

REFERENCES


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The Malaysian National Higher Education Action Plan: Redefining Autonomy and Academic Freedom Under the APEX Experiment

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Universiti Sains Malaysia

“Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge“  Bologna Declaration

Abstract

University autonomy can be defined as the overall ability of the university to act by its own choices in pursuit of its mission, or the power of the university to govern itself without outside control. Universities have the power in three broad areas of self-government, namely, appointive, academic, and financial. University autonomy will have to be exercised in tandem with academic freedom to empower academic decision making and achieve academic excellence. In 2007 the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia published a blueprint entitled the National Higher Education Action Plan 2007-2010 to spearhead the transformation of higher education in the immediate future. The action plan is the working guide for the period of 2007-2010 which was the offshoot of a more comprehensive plan known as The National Higher Education Strategic Plan, which was launched in August 2007. The Action Plan focuses on seven strategic thrusts, where one of the thrust that touches on university autonomy was the fourth thrust, “Strengthening Institutions of Higher Education.” This paper will explore the meanings and interpretations of university autonomy from the theoretical perspectives, discuss their current and future challenges, and their implications to Malaysian scenarios. The Action Plan also laid out strategies to achieve world-class universities in Malaysia through the APEX experiment. Where a university will be selected to carry out the Accelerated Programme for Excellence (APEX). In September 2008, Universiti Sains Malaysia was selected as the first APEX University in Malaysia. The focus of this paper will be the application of the concept of autonomy and academic freedom in the newly established “APEX” university. What are the scope and limits of autonomy that can be tolerated by the state in our drive to achieve a world-class status in the next decade?

Paper presented at the ASAIHL Conference, UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY: INTERPRETATION AND VARIATION, Universiti Sains Malaysia
December 12-14, 2008
Introduction

Democratization of higher education has transformed universities from an institution where a minority of elite were enrolled to a place where large number of qualified college-going cohorts resided. This change is particularly true in developing countries where demand for higher education has increased tremendously. Democratization made higher education more egalitarian, and at the same time minimizes elitism and unequal opportunity. Conservatives have criticized this trend and called it an egalitarian mediocrity or medioracy, where resources are used to educate those who are mediocre.

In the case of Malaysia, democratization of higher education was state driven and it was adopted as the principal avenue for upward socioeconomic mobility and national economic development. It is the major component of the affirmative action outlined in the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1970, which seek to restructure society and eradication of poverty. The NEP favored the Bumiputras, which was previously a disadvantage group, through state sponsorship in financing their higher education. Higher education has played a pivotal role as a vehicle to effectively redress racial and economic inequities. Thus, the post 1970 university enrolment increase many folds and there was a major shift from arts to science and technical fields (Table 1) (Singh, 1989). During the same period Bumiputra participation in higher education at the degree level in public institutions has increased from 40.2% in 1970 to 63.0% in 1985, while the Chinese and Indian enrolment declined from 48.9% and 7.3% to 29.7% and 6.5%, respectively (Table 2) (Ibid.). In 1999, as shown in table 3, the public institutions were dominated by Bumiputra students (69.9%), while the non-Bumiputra students were mostly in the private institutions. This trend continues into the dawn of the twenty-first century, when meritocracy was put forth as the major criteria for university admission, particularly in competitive disciplines such as medicine, pharmacy, law and engineering in premier universities. Higher education in Malaysia is expected to weather stormy period in the near future, particularly after the ruling party (National Front) won a simple majority in the 2008 general election. A landmark inroad made by the opposition in Malaysia’s 51 years after independence. More negotiation and lobbying are expected particularly in
relation to ethnic balance versus meritocracy in university enrolment in public institution of higher education.

Table 1. Malaysia: Enrollment and Output of Degree Holders by Type of Education from Local Institutions, 1970-85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree (%)</td>
<td>7,677</td>
<td>13,698</td>
<td>20,018</td>
<td>32,650</td>
<td>13,987</td>
<td>19,435</td>
<td>26,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
<td>(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (%)</td>
<td>4,877</td>
<td>7,583</td>
<td>9,727</td>
<td>15,471</td>
<td>9,038</td>
<td>11,356</td>
<td>14,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(63.5)</td>
<td>(55.4)</td>
<td>(48.6)</td>
<td>(47.4)</td>
<td>(64.6)</td>
<td>(58.4)</td>
<td>(55.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science (%)</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>4,642</td>
<td>8,046</td>
<td>12,505</td>
<td>4,451</td>
<td>6,513</td>
<td>9,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(31.4)</td>
<td>(33.9)</td>
<td>(40.2)</td>
<td>(38.3)</td>
<td>(31.8)</td>
<td>(33.5)</td>
<td>(34.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical (%)</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td>2,245</td>
<td>4,674</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>1,566</td>
<td>2,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5.1)</td>
<td>(10.8)</td>
<td>(11.2)</td>
<td>(14.3)</td>
<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>(8.1)</td>
<td>(10.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Singh, 1989)

Table 2. Enrollment in Tertiary Institutions by Ethnic Group, 1970-1985 (Percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tertiary Institution</th>
<th>1970¹</th>
<th>1980¹</th>
<th>1985¹</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bumiputera</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Level</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inst. Overseas</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1980¹

|                             | Bumiputera | Chinese | Indian | Others | Total |
| Degree Level                | 62.0   | 31.2   | 5.7    | 1.1    | 21,944|
| Inst. Overseas              | 28.6   | 59.1   | 13.7   | 0.5    | 19,510|
| Total                       | 45.4   | 44.3   | 9.5    | 0.8    | 41,454|

1985¹

|                             | Bumiputera | Chinese | Indian | Others | Total |
| Degree Level                | 63.0   | 29.7   | 6.5    | 0.7    | 37,838|
| Inst. Overseas              | 26.6   | 59.1   | 13.7   | 0.6    | 22,684|
| Total                       | 49.4   | 40.7   | 9.2    | 0.7    | 60,522|

¹- Singh, 1989
Table 3. Enrolment in Private Institution of Higher Learning (IPTS) & Public Institution (IPTA), 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tertiary Institution</th>
<th>IPTS (Private)</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>IPTA (Public)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bumiputera</td>
<td>Non-Bumiputera</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Level</td>
<td>6,345</td>
<td>24,595</td>
<td>30,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Source: OPP3, 2001)

The National Higher Education Action Plan

Malaysia in an effort to be the hub of higher education excellence in Southeast Asia has embarked on a national higher education plan from 2007-2020 to achieve world-class status among its universities. Several reports have been published in recent times with the focus on enabling Malaysian universities to be the leaders in Southeast Asian higher education. In July 2005, The Report by the Committee to Study, Review and Make Recommendations Concerning the Development and Direction of Higher Education in Malaysia (Halatuju Report) was published, which contained 138 recommendations (MOHE, 2006). This report was a controversial one and has not received popular support within the academic community.

In July 2007, The Transformation of Higher Education Document was published (MOHE, 2007). The latest report was the National Higher Education Strategic Plan, which was published in August 2007. This Plan was divided into 4 distinct phases: Phase 1 – Laying the foundation (2007-2010), Phase 2 – Strengthening and Enhancement (2011-2015), Phase 3 – Excellence (2016-2020), and Phase 4 – Glory and Sustainability (beyond 2020). This plan is a major shift in higher education thinking within the Malaysian government and this is the first time so much attention is being paid in terms of planning and strategizing in higher education in the country. The Strategic Plan has laid seven strategic thrusts:

1. Widening access and enhancing quality
2. Improving the quality of teaching and learning
3. Enhancing research and innovation
4. Strengthening institution of higher education
5. Intensifying internationalization
6. Enculturation of lifelong learning
7. Reinforcing Higher Education Ministry’s Delivery System

This paper will touch on the *National Higher Education Action Plan*, which is a Document or action plan that deals with the proposed transformation during the period of 2007 to 2010 as lay down by the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan*. The *Action Plan* contains critical implementation mechanisms and schedules for Phase 1 of the *Strategic Plan* which was named as “Laying the Foundation (2007-2010)”. It will also addresses the seven strategic thrusts listed above.

The *Action Plan* was divided into three parts, namely, part 1 on institutional pillars – strengthening of institutions, part 3 on critical agenda, and part 3 on implementation support. Under strengthening of institution, where university governance is concerned, the issue of university autonomy is stated in relation to the role and powers of the board of directors (BOD). BOD was a new entity created in the Universities and University Colleges Act (Amended 1996) to replace the originally larger University Council. Thus the BOD continues to function as the old university council and has no status or authority like a true corporate board. The *Action Plan* for strengthening of institutions is shown in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Lead Agency</th>
<th>Deliverable</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Amendments to the UUCA to clarify the new roles of the BOD, Vice-Chancellor and Senate to increase self-governance</td>
<td>MOHE, Governance Taskforce</td>
<td>UUCA Amendments</td>
<td>2008:Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Roll-out new empowerment framework for governance and management of HEIs</td>
<td>MOHE, Governance Taskforce</td>
<td>Governance Book</td>
<td>2008:Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Devolution of autonomy in selected areas in stages to the BOD. This move is a precursor to increased autonomy for select institutions.</td>
<td>MOHE</td>
<td>Governance Policies</td>
<td>2008-2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● A system performance-based competitive funding will be implemented at all public HEIs HEIs assume greater responsibility for sourcing and pursuing alternative funding routes which may include gifts, endowments, consulting and commercialization of research.</td>
<td>MOHE, HEI</td>
<td>Funding policy</td>
<td>2009-2010</td>
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The second part of the Action Plan was titled “Critical Agenda – Catalyzing Systemic Change,” requires further scrutiny, particularly the establishment of Apex universities. The Setting up of Apex universities was viewed as an important approach towards achieving world-class status. Apex universities were promised greater autonomy to them to focus in becoming the best.
University Autonomy in Perspective

According the Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education (1988) and reinforced by The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990), university autonomy refers to the independence of the universities from the state and all other forces of society to make decision regarding its internal government, finances, administration, and to establish its policies of education, research, extension work, and other related activities (WUS, 1988). Daniel Levy (1980) published an extensive study on university autonomy and described the relations between universities and government in Mexico. A working definition of autonomy according to Levy is the location of authority is somewhere within the university, in other words the university control the components of institutional self government and decision making. The extent of autonomy can be classified into three components of self government, namely, appointive, academic, and financial (Levy, 1980) (See Table 5).

Table 5. University Autonomy and Components of Self Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Relations</th>
<th>Degree of autonomy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appointive</td>
<td>• hiring, promotion, and dismissal of professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• selection and dismissal of deans, rectors, and other administrative personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• terms of employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>• access (admission) to the university</td>
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<td>• accountability</td>
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(Source: Levy, 1980)
In essence, university autonomy was grounded on the classical western university that has undergone waves of transformation through successive periods between the thirteenth century to the nineteenth century and there after (Stevenson, 2004). It started with the classical model where university was a feudal institution which enjoyed a form of autonomy within the feudal state where subjects such as theology, philosophy and other classical courses were taught to a selected or elite group of the population. The advent of research universities in the nineteenth century, particularly in Germany and later the United States, affect the presence of science and technology and also the rise of the professional schools changed the university classical role as conceived by John Henry Newman (1973). Increase in number of research universities and newly established graduate schools demand for active research and independence from external interference, except for funding from the state.

The departure from the classical and elitist model begins when a system of mass university and land grant university were established and broadening of the curriculum to accommodate newly found disciplines which were before considered not worth teaching at the university level (Kerr, 1964; Bok, 1982). The increase in volume teaching, research, and administration brought about complexity in university structure and the university became a small government of its own and autonomy is essential for effective governance. Since then universities in the United States for example have managed to have complete immunity from many regulation to establish their autonomy over academic affairs. In a landmark case, Justice Felix Frankfurter defended institutional autonomy by declaring, “For society’s good, political power must abstain from intrusion into these activity of freedom, except for reasons that are exigent and obviously compelling.” (Frankfurter, 1957) The freedom mentioned here was “the ‘four essential freedoms’ of a university – to determine for itself on academic grounds on who may teach, what may be taught, how it should be taught, and who may be admitted to study”? (Ibid).

“University autonomy is the freedom of the university as a corporate body from interference by the state or by a church or by the power of any other corporate body, private or public, or by any individual such as a ruler, a politician, government official, ecclesiastical official, publicist, or businessman.” Edward Shils (1991)
University autonomy represents the freedom if members of the university acting on its behalf to decide and conduct their internal affairs, it is not about acting as individuals, which comes under the realm of academic freedom. University autonomy differed between countries, in terms of faculty and administrative appointments for example, in the United States and United Kingdom, they have complete autonomy. While, in Germany, the ministry concerned has a say in appointment of key academic position in the university (Shils, 1991). Whereas, in France and Italy, a national body was set to decide on academic appointment, however it is not governmental, the body was made up of academics from all universities in the country (Ibid.). There is slightly greater autonomy in Italy than in France, where universities and faculty candidates have freedom regarding who to hire or which university to choose without external interference.

Regarding the content of courses to be offered, the degree of autonomy also varies between countries, in the United States and United Kingdom, universities are free to decide their subject matter and requirement for qualification to earn a degree and standard that must be achieved.

According to Shils (1991), no university has been and can be totally autonomous. Two broad areas where universities have been dependent upon are the recognition or accreditation of their degrees and financial support from governments or other patrons. Since the middle age, the right to award degrees was a privileged conferred upon the university by a charter granted by the state or a church and in modern day by a state or accreditation bodies. Degrees that were conferred will be acknowledged by the public or government, as they have been authorized by a legitimate body or an internationally recognized institution. Normally universities will promulgate their own statutes and by-laws, however, in countries like Malaysia the power of the state override the university constitution or by-laws. In some cases the state determines what subjects to be taught, though it may not entail detail prescriptions. We have courses such as Islamic and Asian Civilization, Thinking Technique, Ethnic Relation, and Entrepreneurship, which are required courses in Malaysian public universities, though no evaluation of their effectiveness and relevance has not been carried out thus far.
University financial dependence on government is common scenario in developing countries, where a large number of higher education institutions are state owned. This is also true for Australia where more than 90% of their universities are public institutions. It cannot be denied that financial dependence can lead to infringements of university autonomy, however, since in most developing countries there is no wholly autonomous university, the question on hand is how to strike a balance between autonomy and government interference. In the case of Malaysia, universities are required to admit students who are assigned to them by the central admission unit (Unit Pusat Universiti – UPU) in the Ministry of Higher Education. Even though this imposition restricts the autonomy of the university and deprive them the right to choose incoming students, so far there has been no major complains from neither academic nor administrators of universities. Probably this is a trade-off for Malaysian universities to garner more financial support and increase enrolment, which will incidentally increase their revenues from the government. Malaysian public universities received up to 90% of funding from the government, with the remainder from student fees, and to this effect the Ministry of Higher Education has this message to Malaysia universities: “Being owned and funded by the Government, public higher education institutions must ensure that their strategic objectives are in line with those of the Ministry’s.” (Action Plan, 2007)

In Malaysia, government influence was based on legislative authority or executive decision related to financial power. The government also exert its power to appoint the vice-chancellor or rector and members of the governing body (board of directors); or it may exert influence over such matters as the salaries and conditions of academic staff, not because of any legal authority, but simply because it provides most of the income and can threaten to withhold funding unless its conditions are met. Anderson and Johnston called this, a government influence ‘steering from a distance’ using financial authority. The most direct intervention occurs in Malaysia is where appointment and transfer of academic staff must be approved by government. Currently academic staff has no freedom of mobility, to transfer from one public university to another without the approval of the government (university authority); they will risk the penalty of losing
their lifelong retirement benefit if they decide to transfer without official approval. Thus, academic mobility between universities is not commonly practiced in Malaysia and is not encouraged. The scenario of Malaysian universities fits well into the picture described by Simon Marginson (1997):

Far from being naturally ‘outside’ government, the modern university is a product of government and serves the purposes of government, though it also have other constituencies and purposes. Conventional academic freedom is ... exercised within boundaries controlled by government and management.

Results of a survey by Anderson and Johnston in 20 countries in 1998 reveals a very wide range in the extent to which governments have legal authority to intervene—from under 20 per cent to more than three quarters of the issues that were presented. The rank order of countries on ‘legal authority to intervene’, from low to high is listed in table 6.

Table 6. Rank order of countries on legal authority to intervene, from low to high.

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<td>Indonesia</td>
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It will not be misleading if we say that university autonomy is the prerequisite for a world-class university. History has testified that those universities which retained their autonomous status, some since medieval times, have proven to be resilient, have a long tradition scholarship and are at the forefront of research in their own societies. Autonomy will promote academic freedom and intellectual dynamism that is central to the atmosphere of a world-class university.

The Unesco recommendation on institutional rights, duties and responsibilities clearly stated under paragraph 17 that:

17. The proper enjoyment of academic freedom and compliance with the duties and responsibilities listed below require the autonomy of institutions of higher education. Autonomy is that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability, especially in respect of funding provided by the state, and respect for academic freedom and human rights. However, the nature of institutional autonomy may differ according to the type of establishment involved.

University Autonomy vis-à-vis the National Higher Education Action Plan

The National Higher Education Action Plan specifically mentioned that under strengthening of institutions (universities), the government has implemented legal framework to transfer more powers to universities, which were before rested with the minister or ministry of higher education. This is unavoidable because the government intends to make universities more dynamic, competitive, and able to confront new challenges in a globalize world. They will have to create universities (environment) that will be able to attract better talent and navigate cutting edge research. Their graduates will also be of quality and able to meet the need of modern contemporary expectations locally or at the international level.

The government acknowledges the need of universities to be given greater autonomy and accountability to pursue the above objectives. One of the obstacles that have to be overcome is the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA), that has many restrictions and prescriptions that can delayed or even halted the reform under the Action
Plan. The UUCA was last amended under the failed corporatisation plan in 1996. It was a half baked amendment where only governance were amended, where the old university council was replaced by the board of directors (BOD) and the old senate was downsized, and gave more power to the vice-chancellor to appoint his or her own senate. It was a dark day for academic decision making, and an erosion of academic democracy within a university. The old senate where all professors were members and elected faculty representatives were presence was removed and a 40 member senate was put in its place with the vice-chancellor as the chair, followed by deputy vice-chancellors, all the deans and directors of academic and research centers, and no more than 20 professors who are appointed by the vice-chancellors.

The present UUCA is currently in the process of being amended the first reading of the bill has been tabled in the Malaysian Parliament in August 2008; the second reading is expected to be conducted in the middle of December 2008. The proposed amendment is not an overhaul of the UUCA; the amendments are cosmetic in nature, except that in relation to the student rights and responsibility, the power that previously rested with the minister is now transferred to the vice-chancellor. The amendment also proposed the enlargement of the BOD from 8 to 11 members. Another proposal is regarding the senate, where the power to elect 20 professors to the senate will be given to professors and associate professors, which states:

Section 17(B) (d) not more than twenty professors to be elected for a term of three years by all full-time professors and associate professors of the University;
(e) not more than five persons from the University to be co-opted by the Vice-Chancellor for a term of three years.

(UUCA Proposed Amendment 2008)

In the Action Plan, the issue of university autonomy is not fully described nor explained. It vaguely implied that the university autonomy rested with the BOD if we look at one of the proposed plan of action which states that, “Devolution of autonomy in selected areas
in stages to the BOD. This move is a precursor to increased autonomy for selected institution.” If we go to the original document, *The Report by the Committee to Study, Review and Make Recommendations Concerning the Development and Direction of Higher Education in Malaysia (Halatuju Report)*, which is the antecedent of the Strategic Plan, there it was clearly stated that the BOD should be the guardian of autonomy of the university. It states that, “The University BOD is the highest executive body in the university and all powers of the university is placed and held by the BOD.”

Another issue that the *Action Plan* does not touch but is very crucial in relation to autonomy and academic freedom within a university is where academics have been slammed with the Statutory Bodies Disciplinary Rules and Surcharge (Act 605) over and above the rules and regulations under the General Orders, which classified academics as government servants. In addition, academics were mandated to sign a loyalty oath, the Aku Janji (I Pledge) contract or declaration document to further restrict the conduct and activities inside and outside their work places. These restrictions reduced our academics to nothing less than second-class citizens.

We need to draw attention that loyalty oath is a preemptive restriction on freedom of academics. It reminded us of what happened in Italy under the Fascist regime where such oath was required of academics since the late 1920s (Shils, 1991). The loyalty oath is repugnant to the dignity of the academic profession, they implied that without subscribing to the oath, academics will commit or encourage and act of subversion or treason. This is a preposterous assumption that has to be totally condemned by all thinking academics.

**Redefining University Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Apex University**

The Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education, defines academic freedom as “the freedom of members of the academic community individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation,
teaching, lecturing and writing.” Academic freedom is the conscience of the university, it
touches on the rights and responsibilities of lectures and students, it will color the nature
of teaching and scholarship (Wan Manan, 2000).

It cannot be denied that academic freedom and university autonomy are closely linked or
sometimes synonymous, notwithstanding, nowadays academic freedom have frequently
being abused by many sectors, including from within the university. According to the
Association of American University Professors (AAUP), ‘sound governance practise and
the exercise of academic freedom are closely connected, if not inextricably linked’
(AAUP, 1994, 3), and Scott (2005) argues that ‘the faculty’s role in governance, is the
foundation of academic freedom’. In the past protection for academic freedoms was
through the tradition of participation by faculty members in academic governance
(Rochford, 2003). However, in the last few decades the rise in managerialism, and a
gradual decline in democratic participation by faculty, partly led to a weakening of
academic freedom. As pointed out by McMaster (2002):

‘Universities have always been managed: the guilds of scholars that made up
the first universities were themselves hierarchies of authority. The main
difference is that authority in current operational models of universities is seen
to be related to managerial position and not to expertise within a discipline.’

Nyborg (2003) observes that the ‘situation in which the permanent academic staff no
longer holds the majority of votes on the governing body’ as ‘a significant departure from
traditional European practice with considerable implications for higher education
governance.’

The situation in the developing countries is no different, since globalization and
managerialism has sipped into university governance worldwide. Reconciling academic
freedom, university autonomy and corporate model of management will be a daunting
task to come inn the near future. Members of the academic community should be vigilant
in defending their academic freedom and autonomy. The Unesco recommendation on
rights and freedoms of higher-education teaching personnel clearly stated under
paragraph 27 that:
27. The maintaining of the above international standards should be upheld in the interest of higher education internationally and within the country. To do so, the principle of academic freedom should be scrupulously observed. Higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. All higher-education teaching personnel should have the right to fulfill their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source. Higher-education teaching personnel can effectively do justice to this principle if the environment in which they operate is conducive, which requires a democratic atmosphere; hence the challenge for all of developing a democratic society. (Unesco, 1998)

Thus, we cannot doubt that academic freedom is the cornerstone for erecting a world-class university, particularly in a developing country like Malaysia. However, in Malaysia the state of academic freedom is much to be desired.

In the Action Plan, the approach for Malaysian universities to achieve world-class status is through the establishment of what is known as “Apex Universities”, which is a conceptual construct that in due time will stand atop the pyramid of higher education institutions in the country. They will represent the nation’s center of academic distinction, and will be given greater latitude in order to work towards achieving their world-class status. It was enunciated that the Apex University will have, the best leaders, the best faculty, the best students, and the vest facilities. A task force was established in 2007 to develop the criteria and shortlist existing institutions of higher education in the country, be it public or private to be considered for selection. Institutions in the running were asked to submit their existing strength and long-term development plan.

The original Apex definition was later redefined by the task force, to a slightly different construction. It became an Accelerated Program for Excellence (APEX), no more a crown given to the Apex University, but more of a program to achieve a higher level of excellence within a specified time period as presented in their development or transformation plan.
IN 2008, ten universities applied to join the APEX experiment, where only four universities were shortlisted. The APEX evaluation team visited these four universities to get picture and feedback on the ground. On September 3, 2008, the Minister of Higher Education officially announced that Universiti Sains Malaysia was selected as the only APEX University in the Malaysia. The announcement received mixed responses from the academic community and the public at large, where the University of Malaya and their alumni felt they were sidelined, considering that the university was the top in Malaysia in the Times Higher Education Supplement ranking for 2008. The discussion and debate continue till today in various blogs and newspapers.

The APEX university will “be given autonomy to allow them to focus on becoming the best.” However, the concept of autonomy in this instance is moot. It specifically stated in The Action Plan that the BOD will have full authority over the governance of the institution and BOD will “implement a stringent process to select the best individuals available to serve as the Vice-Chancellor…” This statement does not portray university autonomy as what was enunciated by the Lima Declaration or Unesco recommendation, it reflect the concentration of power in the hands of BOD. It is the dictatorship of BOD. It is making a mockery of university autonomy. The autonomy of the university should be within the academic sphere, particularly the senate and the academic community within the university in general. University autonomy should come hand in hand with academic freedom. In the above case university autonomy and academic freedom will be under threat from within, by the very person or body that claimed to be on the side of university autonomy, but practiced otherwise. In some instances there is BOD or Vice-Chancellors who pledged to safeguard university autonomy as a lip service device to gain popularity with academics and students.

In the case of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), the development plan that won her the APEX initiative was the document entitled “Transforming Higher Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow” (2008); no doubt we should congratulate USM for its lofty agenda. However, the one hundred page proposal is silence on university autonomy or
academic freedom. Even though the word “autonomy” appeared a few times in the proposal, however, there was not a single mention of academic freedom. The transformation plan listed one thousand and one things USM will or ought to do, except for any deliberation on university autonomy. This omission is an abhorrence and contrary to the aspiration to be a world-class university. Surprisingly too, there was no mention also of the Universities and Universities Colleges Act (UUCA), the very instrument that may impede them on their climb to world-class university or world-class academics. Perhaps, the USM APEX dream team did not think they are urgent and relevant.

Suffice to have touch on the lack of deliberation on autonomy and academic freedom within the newly chosen APEX University, the immediate challenge for USM is to define and deliberate the newly found autonomy, if any. Having informed of the impeding amendment to the UUCA in the Malaysian Parliament, the APEX university by-laws should be more liberal or flexible than the newly amended UUCA. APEX universities were promised more autonomy and greater latitude in their governance, teaching, learning, and research practices. For example if the amended UUCA stipulates that the senate should comprise of 20 professors elected from among the professors and associate professors, the APEX senate should be more democratic and transparent. They should have elected representatives from among the academic of each faculty, school, institute or centre that conduct academic and research activities. There should a stronger senate, the senate should be the seat of university autonomy, and it should be empowered, leaving the BOD to deal with issues of policies and direction of the university. Collegiality should be exercised and academic culture must be nurtured.

If USM aspire to be world-class, it needs to follow the rule and participate in the game world-class universities played. They should attract the best talent (staff and students) irrespective of race or color. Merit scholars and merit students have to be generated to compete on the global level.
Conclusion

University autonomy has been under attack the world over, and Malaysia is no exception, the attack or threat to autonomy came from outside by various government agencies as well as from within the academic community. The university is in a state of limbo, there are people within government who want to run universities as government departments, after all academics by definition within the Malaysian terms of employment is a government servant, and on the other hand there are who likened the university as business agency.

Both the Universities and University Colleges Act and Statutory Bodies (Discipline and surcharge) Act (Act 605) are document that show blatant curb on academic freedom and university autonomy.

Unless academic freedom is given its due place and respect within a university, significant contribution to the quality of the institution as a whole cannot be promoted to an excellence level.

In world-class universities, academics can participate as free citizens within the public sphere or as experts in their fields giving expert opinions. Whereas, in countries where partial form of restriction existed, the role of academics is regulated and censorship often silenced them from expressing their concerns which can be a loss to society.

Unless academic freedom is given its due place and respect within an autonomous university, significant contribution to the quality of the institution as a whole cannot be promoted to an excellence level. President Casper of Stanford University gave a succinct answer on why Stanford became a world-class university within a relatively short period of its existence, “Stanford treasures academic freedom as the soul of the university.” (Yingjie Wang, 2001).
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The Apex University: A tall order?

Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim


I WISH to extend my congratulations to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for securing the position of Apex University over eight other universities.

Almost everyone was caught by surprise that USM was granted Apex (Accelerated Programme for Excellence) status as neither The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) Report nor Kajian Penarafan Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Awam (Setara) found USM the top university in Malaysia.

In both evaluations, University of Malaya (UM) is ahead of all the other local universities.

Nevertheless USM was chosen (I presume) based on its groundbreaking initiatives, impressive accelerated programme for the future and marketing strategies.

The Apex University is to be given autonomy in several areas which is the compelling reason for its creation.

However, it is wise to question the concept and degree of freedom and empowerment accorded to it both at the conceptual and practical levels. Autonomy brings not only privileges but also responsibilities that are not easy to execute.

There is need for a total systemic organisational change, both in its processes and inputs in the long run.

Looking into financial and staffing issues, the Apex University would have to study how to operationally manage its manifold financial and staffing arrangements and responsibilities.

The major question is how the Apex University has to ensure the stability of its financial operations and dealings before procedures and regulations are finalised; and how to adjust to new rules and regulations existing side by side with the present financial accountability in the government.

The Treasury, Public Service Department and other central agencies including the Higher Education Ministry must move in tandem with the new Apex University.

The Apex University will invite the best brains to its campus

In a departure from present practice, deans have more powers in hiring and firing.
The Job description Index for the Apex University has to be different from other universities; the attainment of excellence necessitates a service scheme that is both rewarding and competitive.

The Apex University is for academics who can fulfil demanding organisational needs and aspirations, especially in research and publications.

Probable new issues would surface which can have legal, ethical and humanistic considerations.

Would certain academics then feel comfortable remaining in a fiercely competitive environment?

Or would they be shown the exit door of the Apex campus because he or she does not measure up to expectations?

Obviously the remuneration of tenured professors and outstanding lecturers should be higher relative to the other universities.

Is there proper administration and management not only for the top rung of the Apex University but also for those below the Chancellory?

Are the deans of faculties or schools trained to manage?

Decentralisation within the context of the Apex University needs to be structured and accounted for because incompatibility of procedures and values between the top and decentralised levels may surface.

A good mix of centralisation and decentralisation is needed between, firstly, the ministry and the University and, secondly, between the Chancellory and faculties or schools.

Who actually is in control of what happens in the Apex University must be spelt out clearly, especially between the Vice Chancellor and the deans and heads of studies.

Perhaps in this area, the University Board, comprising professional members, can play a positive role in balancing the power to be made available to the Apex University.

There is need for excellent leadership. Without prejudice to the present incumbent, the Vice Chancellor of the Apex University has to be selected through a stringent process to ensure the right man for the job.

USM has come out with a plan to transform itself to be ranked among the top 100 by 2020.

While it has a plan in hand, USM needs to reflect upon stakeholders and their needs. It has to evaluate its strategic fit to guarantee success.

To be true to its status as an Apex University, USM has to attract the best students.

Its location away from the Klang Valley should not be a deterrent to students.
It has been suggested that student admission should be based on merit and reflect Malaysia's demographic profile.

One needs to be clear on the combination of demographic profile and merit.

Ivy League universities attract the best students.

It is good politics to employ equal opportunity for diverse students but instituting demographic profile as a criterion may be contradictory to an Ivy League modus operandi.

Given all these factors, one cannot escape visualising USM as a self-contained mechanism different from other universities.

Transforming organisations, such as the Apex University, involves changes in mindsets.

It has to consider values of excellence, the academic community, commitment to better outcomes and superb stewardship.

Given only five years to achieve this goal and be among the top 200, USM will have to pull out all the stops to do that.

* Tan Sri Dr Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim is Malaysian Qualifications Agency Chairman. The above are his personal views and do not reflect those of the government or MQA.

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