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# **Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS): Towards Maximizing the potential of its Human Resource Development (HRD)**

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## **Abstract**

*As strategic education agenda works to prepare competent graduates, human resource development has become crucial for uplifting the internal strength of the university. University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) relatively a 'young' university has been engaged in establishing learning interaction among its staffs towards excellence. This paradigm is paramount to the strategic human resource provider as it allows not only the students who will be graduating but the young faculty members and its administrative staffs to excel. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the keys to successful university undertaken by UMS. In less than ten years, the faculty members as well as the administrative staffs manage to position the university at par to that of other established higher learning institutions in the nation. With the establishment of learning interaction, human resource development of UMS have shown some impact for promoting educational excellence among Malaysians. Indeed competent human resource plays an important role to meet the vision and the mission of UMS- strive to excel.*

## **Introduction**

As far as education is concerned, the Malaysian government has put in place a good framework of legislations on education which were tabled in the House of Parliament

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between 1995 and 1997. “Education reform” is seen as a key concern in Malaysia (with the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak) since independence in 1963. The establishment of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) in 1995 is one of the government’s efforts towards meeting the need of competent human knowledge-based or knowledge economy. One of the primary concerns of UMS is to develop a world-class quality education system that meets the demands and requirements of the new millennium.

### **Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia: a Brief Background**

Currently there are 11 public universities and 6 university collages established under the Universities and University Colleges Act. There are 315,700 students currently enrolled as of the academic year 2002/2003 and 16,003 academic staff with an operating budget for the year 2003 that stands at RM4,000.6 billion. This budget does not include the development budget of RM2,890.2 billion for the year 2003.

Table 1

#### **Number of Schools and Higher Institutions in Malaysia**

<b>Type of schools/ Institutions</b>	<b>Year 2000</b>
Primary schools	7,231
Secondary schools	1,645
Private International Schools (Primary & Secondary)	29
Local Public Universities & University Colleges	17
Private Universities & University Colleges	14
Branch Campuses of Foreign Universities	4
Private Colleges Offering "3+ 0" Foreign University Degree Programs	36
Private Colleges	690

Source: Malaysian Educational Statistics 2000a.

Malaysia also has a high number of approved higher learning institutions comprising 11 private universities and 3 university colleges (table 1). This also includes 4 foreign university branches, namely the University of Norttingham, the University of Monash, FTMS-DeMonfort University and the Curtin University of Technology. There are also currently 36 Private Colleges offering “3+ 0” Foreign University Degree Programmes and 650 private colleges registered with the Private education Department of the Ministry of Education with an enrolment of 243,844 students as of June 2002 (Study in Malaysia Hand Book, 2003; Abu Hassan Othman *et al.*, 2003).

In tandem with the aspiration in preparing Malaysia as a centre of excellence for higher education, the Division of Quality Assurance, Ministry of Education recommended that by the year 2005, 75 percent of the academic staff in local institution of higher education must possess doctoral qualifications (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2001).

### **Back ground of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)**

University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been growing and developing progressively in the rapid pace of globalization to realize its aspiration of becoming a quality university of world class standing in line with the University's motto "Strive to Excel". The excellent achievements in the previous years remained so in the year 2004, as a result of constant efforts of all campus residents in ensuring that UMS could develop as planned.

With a mission to boost Malaysian's educational excellence, UMS has come a long way. The beginning of UMS started in 1995 with very limited resources and has just reached another milestone when it is now celebrating her 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary which began last year on the 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2003. Being the ninth out of seventeen public higher institutions in the nation, UMS vision and mission was to look for opportunities for economic development of Malaysia to attain Vision 2020 towards status of a developed country.

Main focus of UMS is to impart knowledge, skilled and instill the attitudes to the students and encourage the understanding of global context in academic strategies. The main role of UMS is to produce a competent workforce equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitude and behavior to meet the demands of the high-technology era. In that respect courses in Applied Science and Technology, Information Technology, Electronics, Engineering, Biotechnology, Manufacturing and Communication are being expanded.

### **General overview of Human Resource in Malaysia**

In recent years, a global consensus has emerged in the importance of investing in human capital, which is viewed as an essential part of efforts to raise incomes and achieved sustained economic growth. In that respect the human capital produce from the university educational system should be competitive not only in term of knowledge

and skills, but also in term of character and integrity. The trend of labour market in Malaysia (Table 1) suggests that there is an urgent need to invest in education.

Table 2: Net Supply of ICT and Engineering Graduates from Malaysian Institutions of Higher Learning Into ICT Labour Market, 2000-2005

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>No. of Graduates</b>
Diploma	86,500
Degree (Undergraduates)	89,000
Post-Graduates	4,900
Total	180,400

Source: MDC-MOE Human Resource Survey 2000

The key challenge of the Malaysian education system to compete in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to provide the country with a competent workforce with knowledge and skills. As projected by the Ministry of Education human resource survey, net supply of ICT and engineering graduates into ICT labour market by 2005 is estimated at around 180,400 (Ministry of Education, 2000b). UNDP on the other hand forecast about 104,000 demands for ICT knowledge workers from 1998 to 2007 in Malaysia (UNDP, 1998). Overall it has been widely reported that Malaysia needs an estimated 2.2 million total workforce by 2010. As such the role of higher institutions is to produce a competent workforce equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviour to meet the demands of the high-technology era. Presently, only about 12 percent of the general population pursue tertiary studies locally and a significant portion of those students study abroad (NAPIEI, 2002). By the year 2020, the government hopes that 40 percent of the Malaysian population will attend tertiary education. In that respect, Universiti Malaysia Sabah in particular must play a significant role in fulfilling these needs. Perhaps, the prerequisite of a successful institution of higher learning is to have skilled workforce. Hence human resource development in the university is vital and remains significant in the new millennium.

## Human Resource Development: UMS

Currently University Malaysia Sabah has a total of 964 members of staff, including 494 academic faculty members and 470 non-academic staff members. UMS increased its staff intake gradually from merely 54 in the year 1995.

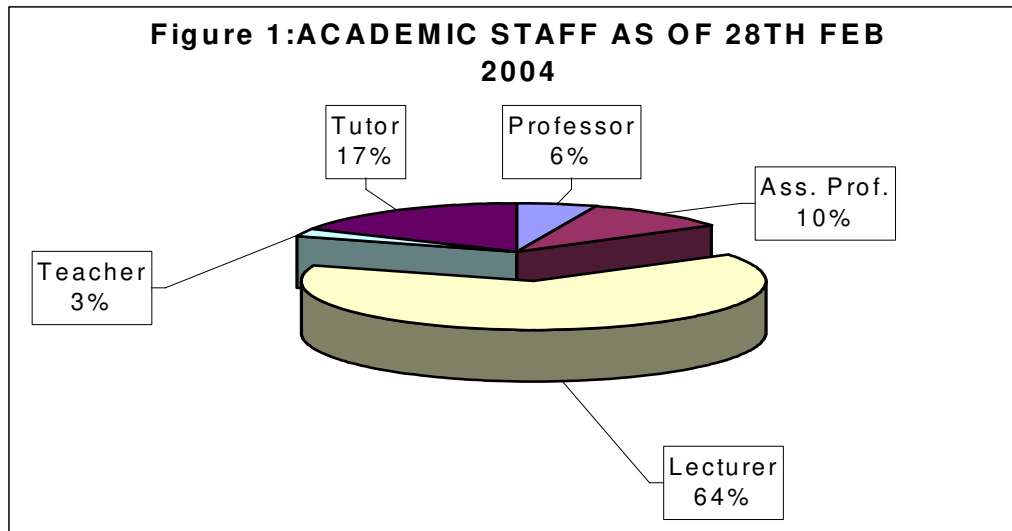


Table3: Staff Recruitment (1994-2001)

Job Designation	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
Senior MGT.	1	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	4
Prof/Asso.Prof. & Lecturer	-	19	30	38	48	43	42	27	247
Language teachers	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	4
Tutors	-	2	5	2	10	31	17	22	89
Management and Professional group	2	6	10	-	14	3	20	-	55
Auxiliary Staff Group I & II	-	24	104	8	57	18	61	57	329
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>329</b>

Table 4: Total Faculty members and Administrative Staffs as of Feb. 2004

<b>Job Designation</b>	<b>2004</b>
Senior MGT.	4
Prof/Asso.Prof. & Lecturer	389
Language teachers	10
Tutors	95
Management and Professional group	71
Auxiliary Staff Group I & II	397
<b>Total</b>	<b>964</b>

Currently the university has a total of 964 members of staff including 494 faculty members. The University projected to have at least about 600 faculty members by year 2005. With globalization ongoing, UMS is seen to have the capability to produce well trained and skilful human resource to meet the demands of the fast changing labour market not only in the nation in general but most importantly within the university faculty members and staffs.

### **Teaching Staff Training Scheme**

As an institution of higher learning UMS has been deeply concerned about the quality of management, teaching and learning. To increase the effectiveness of the academic system, a series of training programmes were organized so that the staff would be more creative and innovative, and would in turn increase the quality and productivity of their work. The Management of UMS agreed that a special course should be conducted for UMS new faculty members who is planning to apply for Scholarships/awards under the University Academic Staff Training Scheme (SKLAU) and also *bumiputera* (son of the soil) Academic Training Scheme (SLAB). Starting from year 2001, UMS has introduced a one month intensive Research Methodology Course which was made compulsory for all academics, with the objective of imparting some fundamental knowledge before they pursue their Master's or Doctorate degree programmes. It has been an ongoing programmed organized yearly by the university so that these young lecturers are well prepared before they start their postgraduate programme locally and abroad.

This course is targeted at providing the academics a strong foundation in research methodology in order to meet the requirements of masters and Ph.D level research.

### **Quality Enhancement**

In line with the government's plan strategy to make it compulsory for all agencies to achieve MS ISO 9000's certificate of quality, UMS responded with confidence to the challenge by taking a few necessary steps to ensure that the University was granted the same recognition of quality to that of other agencies in the nation. As many as 31 work procedures and 11 task orders were documented in the implementation of this quality system. The procedures covered all aspects that were relevant in the implementation of

the undergraduate studies programmes, and office management such as the Bursar, the library, the training and management and Academic staff, the Student Affairs, the Academic Department, the Teaching and Learning, the Filing System, the Lecturers' Task System, Counseling, Discipline, Convocation, Safety and Security and others.

For that purpose and to ensure that quality becomes a work culture in the university, several programmes have been carefully planned for the staff to participate in the workshops, seminars and courses pertaining to the understanding and running of quality system in schools, departments, institutes, and units of UMS.

In term of sport and recreation, the human resource of UMS has shown its ability in organizing sports' activities at national level as well as having its staff and faculty members excelling in the tournaments they participated in.

The implementation of the UMS Quality System will benefit all the UMS staff, students, lecturers, and also the top management level. Among the benefits that have been identified are:

1. Enabling the management to conduct systematic monitoring of the running of all departments involved in the quality system through internal quality audit (IQA) activities
2. Providing standardized work procedures and directives for all staff involved in implementing the quality system
3. Running all operations connected with a particular task with responsibility
4. Instilling a quality work culture among all staffs
5. Establishing benchmarks through which the quality of work can be measured against the quality objectives

### **Enhancing the University HRM programme**

UMS had planned and implemented a few HR programmes inculcating work values and ethics to ensure that the administrative functions of the university are carried out efficiently, effectively and with the sense of accountability. For the past ten years, various activities has been organized namely "Retreat *Hala Tuju* UMS" attended by all



the Deans and Head of departments. A series of dialogue sessions between the UMS administration and staffs on academic code of ethics were carried out for the purpose of disseminating university's vision and mission. In addition an orientation and seminar related to the safety of public properties and enhancing work quality is also ongoing from time to time. The theme of the seminars comprises of enhancing skills, managing files and records, financial management, and management development. These orientation are directly associated with the specific job functions of the staff members. They are aimed at enhancing the staff's skills.

### **HRD Vs Internationalization**

Having been established for less than ten years, UMS has gained recognition for providing quality education particularly to Malaysian, and now even in the international front with overall enrolment figures reaching 10,000. The international student influx into UMS has increased markedly with some 18 different countries represented (Zainudin and Kasim, 2003). Part of the university HRD process is to encourage its faculty members establish international networking and collaboration with scholars from well established higher institutions and organizations abroad. These linkages includes research fellowship with other foreign higher institutions, short term research exchange visit with prominent research institutions and joint regional workshops. UMS has devoted a great deal of effort in developing synergies with the world-renowned institutions. This necessitated pro-active networking and collaboration that have contributed to fostering an international perspective of UMS HRD programs.

These international linkages are strengthening UMS remit to promote excellence. By providing necessary exposure to UMS faculty members, useful training to young tutors and lecturers in selected areas of expertise perhaps will produce the next generation of scholars. Eventually helping the university to improve the mechanism of academic auditing and motivates state-of-the-art research and objectively evaluates merit of individual contribution.

Collaboration with foreign institutions of higher learning takes place at various levels, including cooperation in specific projects such as:

1. co-authorising books and papers, and collectively doing research on problems of mutual interest’;
2. implementing major broad-based programmes of R&D sponsored by international agencies, and;
3. jointly holding conferences/workshops/seminars. Indeed, these are some of the UMS “education revolution” strategies adopted to help increase the country’s capability in R&D to that of developed countries.

Since its establishment ten years ago, UMS has taken an excellent working visit to many world-renowned institutions abroad. Countries UMS has series of visits and meetings includes Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, India, Japan, China and most of the ASIAN member countries (CCIR 2003). Apart from HRD exercise the main objectives of the visit were to explore:

1. Opportunities for cooperation between UMS and these universities
2. Opportunities to study subjects such as international social development, globalization and cross-cultural issues
3. Some exposures in organizing and supporting students doing their field education in overseas settings
4. Experience in working with students from diverse range of migrant backgrounds
5. Some experience in supervising international post-graduate students, and
6. Good connections with a wide range of overseas students.

Besides UMS’s overseas agenda incoming foreign scholars to UMS has also been very active. UMS had the honor of receiving considerable number of distinguished scholars from abroad.

### **Academic faculty exchange programs**

UMS faculty exchange programs are to gain first hand experience. UMS believes that study abroad is necessary for her faculty members and administrative staff to become globally competent. In that respect, UMS tutors in particular are encourage to do their masters program abroad. Indeed, UMS 'democratizes the study-abroad experience'. Last year, for this purpose UMS has sent about 200 tutors abroad. Besides local Institution of

higher Learning other favorite destination are countries such as Japan, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Large proportion of these tutors and junior lecturers undertake their masters and doctorate degrees in the United Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

The HRD program of UMS suggests that the university will succeed in showcasing some of the best practices of the faculty members and strengthening the reputation of the university. To produce a holistic output, UMS has incorporated to its faculty members and its administrative staffs the knowledge, skills, values and virtues together.

Realizing the importance of educated and knowledgeable human resource as an engine of growth, UMS must continue to learn, adapt and search for new opportunities and new sources of growth. Only by consistently improving its skills base and innovative capacity enable UMS stay relevant and competitive in search for excellence. With globalization ongoing, proactive effort taken by UMS towards its faculty members as well as its administrative staffs are crucial for economic progress for Malaysia in general, and for the state of Sabah in particular. As demonstrated in this paper, UMS HRD program succeeded in transforming the university's within a relatively short period of time, and in having a major developmental impact. Much was done, much remains to be done. This paper has demonstrated a large degree of progress, but has also highlighted the areas of concern where better HRD programs are still needed.

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