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STRAITSTIMES IN EDUCATION

HIGHER ED

IT'S TIME
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Platform for sharing knowledge, experiencing culture

COVER STORY

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MOBILITY programmes allow under- and postgraduates to experience short-term training abroad and gain an international perspective to their programme of study.

Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States rank high as traditional destinations for such programmes amongst international university students. Malaysia, too, is a popular country for foreign students on a study stint.

In fact, in the *Shape of Global Higher Education Report - British Council 2016*, Malaysia ranks the first — alongside Germany — in internationalisation of higher education.

Education Malaysia Global Services chief operating officer Novie Tajuddin said: "Malaysian institutions have always hosted mobility students from all over the world. In recent years, student mobility has been a priority of the Higher Education Ministry to drive the internationalisation agenda.

"Public and private universities including international branch campuses are the main drivers for student mobility in the country. Foreign institutions see Malaysia as a good mobility programme partner due to our cultural diversity, recognised and quality education system, biodiversity and heritage."

He added that many universities in Malaysia, though not all, offer mobility programmes.

Monash University Malaysia, Nottingham University Malaysia, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Asia Pacific University, Taylor's University,

UCSI University and Multimedia University are among the tertiary institutions which are most active in mobility programmes of between

three and 12 months, according to Novie.

"In the first six months of the year, Malaysia received more than 1,400 students for various mobility programmes with a duration of between three and 12 months. Many more students sign up for shorter mobility programmes of between one and three weeks. These are typically cultural exchange programmes and academic visits," he shared, adding that the majority of inward mobility students are from Asia and Europe.

On the benefits of such programmes, Novie said for the inbound student, the opportunity to study in a campus abroad expands the student experience, improves knowledge and experience of the Malaysia "Truly Asia" culture as well as facilitates new friendships.

"For students in Malaysia, it's the knowledge-sharing and cultural exchange experience. For the universities, inbound mobility students add to the diversity of international students on campus and raise the profile of the institution. The knowledge-sharing — which is more evident through research collaboration — and cultural exchange between students are also beneficial to the institution. Mobility programmes support an institution's internationalisation objective, strengthen inter-university partnerships and raise the institution's presence abroad."

CUSTOMISED PROGRAMMES

The International Medical University (IMU) established its student mobility programme in 2007 as part of its ASPIRE-Strategic Plan to become one of the leading private universities in Asia. Under the plan, it offers both inbound



Novie Tajuddin



Winnie Chee



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ZELINA Z. IBRAHIM,
Putra International Centre
director

and outbound mobility programmes.

IMU's School of Health Sciences dean Professor Winnie Chee said: "Our inbound mobility programme for international students started with medicine and has since expanded across all IMU programmes including dentistry, pharmacy and health sciences — which cover biomedical science as well as nutrition and dietetics — and chiropractic. Our mobility programmes are customised to the aim of the participating university abroad. This is to ensure the students will have a unique and beneficial experience from cultural exchange to best practices in the related field of study."

IMU mobility programmes include internships, research, electives, study visits and clinical attachments.

"The response from international students has been encouraging. In recent years, we have students from countries such as Canada, China, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and the UK. The student mobility programme provides participants with a myriad of benefits, irrespective of whether the student is an outgoing or incoming mobility scholar. Overseas exposure as part of a degree programme can academically and socially enrich a student's university experience, broaden perspectives and enhance employment prospects," added Chee.

Stuart Miles, a medical student from University of Oxford, England, who did his attachment at IMU, recalls fondly of his time here.

"Over 10 weeks, I relished the chance to experience medicine in a different country and environment, and have enjoyed seeing the similarities and variations in clinical

practice. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here, split between the obstetrics, gynaecology and paediatric departments as an elective student at the IMU based at Hospital Tunku Ja'afar, Seremban," he said.

A group of 16 master's students from the Karaganda State Medical University, Kazakhstan recently completed a two-week course on research management organised by IMU's Institute of Research, Development and Innovation.

One of them, an ultrasound diagnostic technician who works at the Karaganda Hospital, said: "The programme has been an eye-opener and has allowed me to improve my knowledge in the application of and methodology for clinical research. I will definitely apply what I've learnt in my future career."

He added that Malaysia's medical education system is similar to that of Kazakhstan. "I was also curious to experience the diverse culture that Malaysia has to offer."

DIVERSE EXPERIENCE

Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) started its inbound mobility programme in 2010 with the Student Exchange Programme, where international students attend at least one semester at the university.

Associate Professor Dr Ku Zilati Ku Shaari, UTP's head for Center for Student Internship, Mobility and Adjunct Lecture-ship, said: "Later we diversified the inbound mobility programme to provide more options to more countries depending on their needs and interests. For example, students from France are more interested to do their internship in our research labs and students from Korea and Japan are keen to participate in our Summer Programme.

"We have a few inbound programmes that cater to both short- and long-term stints. For short-term, with a duration of less than two months, there is the Cultural Summer Programme, Intensive Learning Programme and Intensive English Programme. For long-term programmes, which can vary from two months to one year, we offer the Full Semester Exchange Programme, Internship and Research Attachment Programme."

Initially participation came from members of GE3 (Global Engineering Education Exchange) and GE4 (Global Education: Exchanges for Engineers and Entrepreneurs), and from universities that UTP has memoranda of understanding with via research activities — mostly from the US, France, Germany, Russia and Austria. "We are expanding our networking with Asian universities in Japan, China, India, Indonesia and Brunei, as well as Middle East universities such as King Saud University and University of Khartoum."

In general, Ku Zilati added, mobility programmes benefit both foreign and local students, as well as the institution.

"For foreign students, it provides them global experience which will increase their adaptability. It also helps in increasing cross-cultural competency in international networking, and fosters independent thought and learning. Participating in mobility programmes encourages individuals to step outside of their comfort zone.

"For the institution, inbound mobility programmes help in increasing its visibility which will improve university ranking even-



Ku Zilati Ku Shaari

tually. Mobility programmes provide potential future networking, particularly with foreign academia and industries; promote knowledge transfer; and increase internationalisation at home."

Dalton Buchanan, 19, an American petroleum engineering exchange student from Missouri University of Science and Technology, said he gets "amazing teaching from the UTP lecturers" as well as the chance to travel around the country and region.

"I chose the programme because of UTP's extremely high educational rating and its beautiful location. One of my favourite experiences so far was when I visited the ecoCare Environmental Education Center along Kerthih River in Terengganu. We planted mangrove trees to help stabilise the biosystem and it was such a fun educational experience! I also joined an activities class which taught survival skills in the wild," he added.

"When I join the workplace, I'll have a leg-up because I now understand the diverse conditions of the world and know how to interact with people from different cultures. In addition, some courses which I attend aren't offered anywhere else in the world."

Jeremy Cuny, 22, a mechanical engineering exchange student from University Paris-Sud (IUT Cachan) in France, is spending two semesters at UTP.

"At first, I came to UTP under an internship programme between my university and UTP in April last year for 10 weeks. Associate Professor Dr Ahmad Majidi Abdul Rani from the mechanical engineering department was my supervisor. I enjoyed this experience so much



UPM international students getting a taste of kampung life during one of the mobility programmes.

that I decided to apply for a study exchange programme. I'm interested to learn about culture and language, improve my English and learn new ways of working and studying.

"I also hope to study non-engineering subjects such as marketing and Bahasa Malaysia, which I cannot pursue at my university. I also love to travel to discover Malaysia and other Southeast Asia countries," he said.

INTERNATIONAL ACCREDITATION

Apart from being an approach to internationalisation at home, mobility is also a driver for alignment and benchmarking against international standards, in terms of delivery of educational and student services, teaching standards and accreditation of courses and degree programmes.

Associate Professor Dr Zelina Z. Ibrahim, director of Putra International Centre at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), said: "Often we assume that experiencing an internationalised education means going abroad to study. But not all students have the resources to study overseas.

"Inbound mobility activities, especially a one-semester mobility activity, provide local students with the opportunity of interacting with international students from different socio-cultural and educational background. The presence of only a few international students can affect the experience of many in class.

"The activity forms one aspect of the flow of international knowledge and new ideas between countries."

The latter is particularly important for semester mobility programmes where the inbound mobility student may transfer the course credits taken at their host university to their home university.

At UPM, for example, there are several programmes which have been accredited by international bodies. The degrees of the Faculty of Economics and Management are accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business, the world's largest business education alliance.

The Faculty of Engineering degrees are accredited by the International Engineering Alliance, under the Washington Accord multi-lateral agreement on accreditation or recognition of tertiary-level engineering qualifications.

UPM's Bachelor of Science (Environmental and Occupational Health) programme is accredited by the United Kingdom Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. Eight Bachelor of Education degrees are accredited by the United States Teacher Education Accreditation Council. Three Bachelor of

Science degrees in chemistry are accredited by the Royal Society of Chemistry, UK.

International accreditation of UPM degree programmes provides an assurance to international universities that their outbound mobility students will enjoy a similarly high standard of education when they spend a semester at UPM.

UPM is also involved in multi-partner mobility programmes such as Asean International Mobility for Students, Asean University Network, Asian Association of Agricultural Colleges and Universities, MEVLANA Exchange Programme Protocol (with several Turkish universities) and European Union mobility projects under ERASMUS+.

The European Union's Erasmus+ programme is a funding scheme to support activities in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. With a duration from 2014 to 2020, most programmes are a one-semester mobility programme.

"We have quite a good response to our programmes from students, particularly from Japan and China. More than half of inbound mobility students come from non-partner universities, providing an indication of our reputation with international universities.

"Last year, UPM received students from 40 countries, representing the continents of Asia, Europe, Africa and North America. However, the top five countries sending mobility students were all from Asia — China, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan and Thailand. These students formed almost 95 per cent of our total inbound mobility students," said Zelina.

Cheng Ling Ling, 22, a student from China participating in a mobility programme at UPM's Faculty of Economics and Management, said being in Malaysia has enabled her to study more independently compared to being in her home country.

"Here, I need to independently prepare for group assignments and presentations. I find that I have the ability to solve problems myself and I have also gained confidence," she said, adding that she chose UPM as a test to gauge how she would fare in a foreign university as she has plans to pursue postgraduate studies outside China.

Of her experience thus far, she finds the courses as well as the nature-friendly activities in rural areas interesting.

"The Consumer Behaviour module has certainly made an impression. And as for culture, Muslim family life is very different from the Chinese. I love the cultural diversity here."

Promoting Education Malaysia

STRATEGISED and concerted efforts have been put in place to drive the mobility agenda and it has gained momentum as an important product segment for education in the country, said Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) chief operating officer Novie Tajuddin.

As an entity tasked to promote the Education Malaysia brand, he said EMGS has made significant investments towards promoting student mobility programmes in the Asia Pacific, Europe and America since 2016.

"We have done this in collaboration with Malaysian institutions, both public and private through participation in leading International Educators Conference and exhibitions such as those organised by the Asia-Pacific Association for International

Education, Association of International Educators (NAFSA - North America), European Association for International Education and Going Global (Europe)," said Novie.

These events, which consist of both conferences and exhibitions, draw between 2,000 and 4,000 participants from the higher education industry at each venue.

"We showcase Malaysian institutions at the exhibition and by having members of academia from Malaysia present papers and talk at the conference, we raise the credibility of the Education Malaysia brand."

At these platforms, Malaysian institutions form collaborations with institutions from all over the world towards formalising student mobility or student exchange programmes, academic mobility, research

collaboration and other longer term academic partnership.

"Foreign institutions see Malaysia as a good mobility programme partner due to our cultural diversity, recognised and quality education system, biodiversity and heritage," said Novie.

He added that Malaysia won the bid to host Going Global 2018, which will take place in March in Kuala Lumpur, and APAIE 2019, also in the capital city.

"This is a testimony to the Higher Education Ministry's commitment to the internationalisation agenda and mobility programmes, specifically. More importantly, it is an acknowledgment by renowned global educators associations of the nation's leadership, commitment and efforts in internationalisation."

INWARD MOBILITY PROGRAMME THEMES/AREAS

1. Heritage & Culture
2. Science & Environment
3. Medicine & Life Sciences
4. Agriculture
5. Language
6. Art & Design
7. Technology & Engineering
8. Entrepreneurship
9. Travel & Hospitality
10. Islamic Finance

Source: Education Malaysia Global Services

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