

**An Interview with
Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin
Vice Chancellor and President
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INTERVIEWER: It is estimated that by 2025, 70% of global student demand will come from the region. How do you feel Malaysia is dealing with this level of demand?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: Studies have shown that student mobility is intra regional and so this should make it easier for us and some of the factors should be cultural, religious and so on. I would think this is a good point for Malaysia if we are thinking of attracting students to our institutions. Bear in mind that this is not the main goal of the institution to attract foreign students, but it is to have diversity and increasing diversity in the institution is always a good thing for our students. It is not always the academic input they require but also cultural and adapting to people of different cultures and religions. This is the main reason we would like internationalization and international students. A lot of people put monetary value on it and I think this is the wrong way to do it. Also for us international students are not just diversity but also quality. It is important to ensure that those that want to come are genuine and have the required entry merits.

For UKM we look at human resource development as building capacity for technological innovation and also handling the innovation and bringing it to the market, entrepreneurial skills. We combine research and training in the two areas of technological innovation and entrepreneurial ability. This is about building a culture. We look at postgraduate education and research and see how we can make sure the people we train are technology savvy and able to bring it to the market, so it is about producing people who are scientifically sound but also able to market the products. This a challenge for me to produce different talent bases. There is one type, which is formal education, postgraduate, and the other aspects the informal workshops and seminars and training to ensure they understand how to bring products to the marketplace. You have to do this within industry and we work very closely with our international partners. We need to work with them and benefit from their expertise. What we do in the formal program is having a lot of problem solving, cutting lectures and getting them to do more work. We try to get them into starting businesses on campus. I have also set up a Centre for Entrepreneurial and SME Development.

CESMED. We work with SME Corporation. The idea is that if there is a problem with an SME jointly we work with them to solve that. It could be a technological problem, a business plan or marketing and it is a win-win situation because the students learn and the SME's develop. This is a program for undergraduates. Post graduates and MBA students work with our center for collaborative information and pick up technology from IP's from our research and test the idea to see whether it can be brought to market.

INTERVIEWER: How does the University aim to remain competitive within the region? How will UKM attract corporate sponsorship and integration with your courses?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: For local students, much of the support comes from the government with the loan schemes they already have. They also have scholarships for students to take up postgraduate courses. The students have to apply for these; the only difference is that some corporate bodies will ask us to arrange special classes for them. These would be in the social sciences and business, anti corruption and special classes; we do get special sponsorship for this. If you really maintain your reputation you can attract sponsorship. The Minister has also announced an industry scholarship, every industry puts in some money and this is to attract industry related PhD's.

INTERVIEWER: There is a transition in the Malaysian economy and there may be some sectors left behind. How do you see the University integrating itself so that it retains education for certain trades in order to maintain a balance of the economy?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: I do not think we would go down that track but we might link up with an institution that needs us. We are exploring but it is not my priority at the moment. We do however need people trained at a vocational level but this is for the country to decide nationally and there are already institutions trained to do this.

INTERVIEWER: The government wants to produce 5000 PhD's by 2015?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: This is very achievable, that is 1000 a year in five years. I see a trend already in my university, in the early days we had very few but in the last four or five

years it has increased. Last year we graduated 230 this year I think 250 and these PhD's are from one university. Suppose the other five produce 200 then we will achieve 1000. So it is a very achievable target. This fast trend has come about due to government aims to have more technical and research universities. I know one of my key performance indicators is postgraduate so I know that I have to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to attract people to our university.

INTERVIEWER: As far as Research and Development is concerned, last year Malaysia had 98 international patents produced. In line with the government is research something you are focusing on?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: Our research does lead to the creation of many products. Of course sometimes we file for patents, but not always. Filing a patent does not mean it will go to the market; there are many steps to reach the market. However, filing and getting a patent is one of the key performance indicators. This can be a very expensive process if you are not selective about what you patent. I think we should have a proper committee for this, which is why I set up the centre for collaborative innovation. Technology transfer and they have a method of selecting products to be filed for patents. I think we need some targets so we have quality research that produces something but you should not hurry and file just because it is a KPI.

INTERVIEWER: Is UKM driving toward any particular sector as far as Research and Development is concerned?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: We have eight, but six are good areas for us to push forward. I would say green technology with emphasis on bio fuels and solar energy and medical, we have some good things that could make some breakthroughs in the medical sector, but of course these take a while due to clinical trials. Our areas of focus are nano technology pushed toward communications, solar energy and also medical.

INTERVIEWER: How do you go about recruiting faculty staff? How do you attract experienced PhD qualified lecturers?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: Apart from nice features about the country that attract people here, we have a nice campus that is very close to the airport. The salary is negotiable and the government has given us some flexibility in this area. Also we take care of their children's education and make life easy for them. Of course

other universities can replicate these. I would think what would attract them is our approach to research and education. This is something that would attract people to UKM. For example while we push forward on technology transfer, we believe in social business, in knowledge transfer to communities and government for policy changes, not for money but for an impact on lives. This philosophy of community engagement and industry engagement, CSR, has endeared us to people. We have attracted numerous laureates in residence the most prestigious chair in the university.

INTERVIEWER: People are looking for new structures after the economic downturn, including Islamic Finance. How do you feel about Islamic Finance?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: We have a large group of people who look at Islamic Finance. The Institute of West Asian Studies (IKRAB) is one group. There is another group in the faculty for economics and another group in the Islamic faculty. These three groups get together and do a lot of work in Islamic Finance. We also have formal courses in Islamic Finance at undergraduate and postgraduate level. There are other organizations doing this as well.

I think we should get together and do something useful for the country. There are top down and bottom up research grants, this is an area they are giving research funding for us to develop and some of us are on board. We encourage it very much and see it as the future. It did not fail in the last crisis so there must be something good about it.

INTERVIEWER: Malaysia is an Islamic country with a very international image; therefore it attracts people from the Middle East and all over the world. There is a market within the EU and the U.S. of students interested in travelling. What is your interest at the moment in recruiting students from these parts of the world?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: We attract them through Global Mobility Partnership programs; these are short courses of about a month and they can take home credits. When we attract them it is to offer a unique experience that we think they would enjoy. During the summer period we have students from the U.S., the U.K., Europe and Australia. They do a bit of classroom work and a lot of fieldwork. This is to get experience in understanding the indigenous communities and culture. They look at sustainable development and we take them to see indigenous people and they stay with them and we take them to see the Geo Park in Langkawi or to an inland lake. These

are all our research stations, we have around seven in the country and these are places where you involve the local communities and do scientific research for sustainable development. They participate in the research and we work together with institutions such as UNESCO and teach them entrepreneurship and turning natural resources to money. When these students come from western countries they can see what we do and leave some impression on them even if they are not here for three or four years. These sorts of programs attract people from the developed world; you really have to customize the programs even if they are not interested in the formal programs. It is good for us they mix with our students.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel the schemes are going, do you feel this is helping to attract the international community to Malaysia?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: International is too wide, that is why we have to segment them to the U.S., U.K., Europe and so on. Australians like to go to Europe and the U.S. this is why we did this to attract them because the problem was the Australians not coming to Asia. This program is very popular with the Australians. Korean and Japanese often come here because they want to learn the language. So we cannot say international students, we have to understand their individual needs. We are in the process of understanding.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have collaboration with international universities?

DR. SHARIFAH HAPSAH SYED HASAN SHAHABUDIN: We have a lot and this is why they come, we have an exchange. It takes time to set up campuses elsewhere and to develop mutual trust. We have developed a program with a number of universities for the double degree over a period of years and by now we are very confident with each other's programs. At the end they get two degrees. This type of program takes a long time to develop but once you implement it and sustain it the students are really marketable. Companies snap them up. They may go away to a German company for instance but we do not see it as brain drain, more as brain circulation as they will come back eventually with more knowledge.

In terms of employment around 70% of our graduates went to employment a few months after graduation and the rest in post graduate education and some waiting for a teaching assignment but they know where they are going. It shows we do not have a problem in this department and I have asked our alumni office to ask more

information. I want to know whether they are self-employed entrepreneurs or in suitable employment.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much.