

Universities to specialise

Each to focus on specific areas

BY S. INDRAMALAR

PUTRAJAYA: All public universities will now have to specialise in specific areas of research and postgraduate work to reduce duplication and to use financial resources more efficiently.

Universiti Malaya (UM), for example, will focus on medicine, dentistry and law; and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) on agriculture and biotechnology.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh said yesterday that the Cabinet had approved different areas of specialisation for the various universities (see chart).

With each university focusing on specific areas, there will be minimal overlap of human resource development and better allocation of research budgets.

Universities can also develop centres of excellence within their areas of specialisation.

"At the moment, we are stretching ourselves too thin. Now, each university sends its own academics for postgraduate studies or training overseas. There is duplication because UM, USM (Universiti Sains Malaysia) and UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) may all be sending their medical professors for the same training.

"By creating niche universities, our human resource development will be more focused," he told reporters before chairing his ministry's post-Cabinet meeting here yesterday.

Dr Shafie said the niche areas of each university were identified by the ministry after consultation with the 17 universities based on their strengths in terms of their teaching staff and research, student performance, facilities and curriculum.

"The universities' strength in teaching, for instance, is measured by its ability to attract students as well as the quality of graduates... whether their graduates are marketable or not. The number of breakthroughs, on the other hand, is an indicator of their research strength," he explained.

Dr Shafie said universities, however, could continue to offer courses that did not come under their areas of specialisation.

"For example, one of UM's niche areas is medicine. However, this does not mean other universities will cease to offer medical programmes. The medical programmes at various universities will differ as they will each focus on different areas," he said.

Based on this exercise, UPM will revert to specialising in agriculture, to propel Malaysia as a centre for processing, packaging and marketing of agricultural products for global markets.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: AREAS OF SPECIALISATION

UM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Medicine• Dentistry• Economics and Administration• Law• Biological and Physical Sciences• Language and Linguistic• Engineering
UKM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biotechnology• Engineering• Social Science• Allied Health• Law• Medicine (Post Graduate)• Actuarial Science
USM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pharmacy and Toxicology• Marine and Environmental Science• Molecular Biology and Medicine• Advanced Composite Material• Information Technology and Bioinformatics
UPM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural and Forestry• Fisheries• Veterinary Science• Biotechnology and Food Technology
UTM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engineering, Architecture and Urban Planning• Information Technology and Communication
UUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bio-Engineering and Bio-Science• Real Estate Management and Geoinformation Science
UIAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounts• Information Technology• Management
UNIMAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The integration of Islamic values and perspectives in the curriculum (across the board)
UMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information Technology• Medical Biotechnology• Cognitive Science• Environmental Science
UPSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education
UITM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounting• Art and Architecture• Law• Business Management• Hotel and Tourism• Information Technology• Media and Communication• Performing Arts
KUIM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islamic Studies (across all disciplines)• Comparative Law
KUSTEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marine Biotechnology• Mangrove Research and Rehabilitation• Turtle Research and Rehabilitation• Management and Biodiversity Rehabilitation• Aquaculture
KUITMO	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engineering Education• Engineering and Technology
KUTKM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engineering and Manufacturing Technology
KUKTEM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemical Engineering and Industrial Biotechnology• Automotive Engineering and Manufacturing
KUKUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electrical and Electronic Engineering

Nine "centres of excellence" will be set up within the university such as the Food And Agriculture Policy Research Institute, Centre for Entrepreneur Development and the Agriculture Development Institute.

On another matter, Dr Shafie said the National Higher Education Fund Corporation had identified 82 loan defaulters. Their names have been published in a local daily. Of the total, two had been issued court summonses on Tuesday.