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## COLUMNIST



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### Universal character of Malaysian universities



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Writer is a deputy vice-chancellor, INTI Laureate International University

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QUALITY: MQA has helped make our higher education a brand of Malaysian excellence



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IN the 1990s, four decades after independence, Malaysia articulated the agenda of Malaysia as a Centre of Educational Excellence.

Democratisation of education was also articulated in the wake of the reformulation of the concept of lifelong learning and e-learning and smart schools. The importance of visioning and setting and articulating a clear agenda is demonstrated when, one-and-a-half decades later, Malaysia has become the preferred destination for education of students from throughout the world.

Malaysian universities had never really been parochial because of the long and intimate connection with the English language as an international language of knowledge, and the British and British Commonwealth education systems.

The books in English in the university libraries and public libraries are evidence of the close intellectual and scholarly ties with the Western world. The bookshops also show evidence of the relative openness of

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the Malaysian mindsets and the passion to pursue knowledge from all sources.

The early generations of Malaysian academicians were educated mainly in the English-speaking world. The thousands of masters and doctoral theses written by Malaysians who studied in universities in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Hong Kong marked the intellectual indebtedness in almost all fields of knowledge to the western world.

Malaysian scholars were also educated in Taiwan and China and the various countries of the Middle East. The medium of learning and research as well as the reading and writing cultures in the Malay, English, Arabic and Chinese languages assured the global and universal ethos of Malaysian universities.

Although typically school and university systems are parochial, to date the Malaysia system has managed to remain universal and global and has not been enmeshed in parochial traditions in knowledge domains although there is always the politicisation of education.

The University of Malaya in Singapore and the Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur were modelled after the Oxbridge tradition. The leading schools such as the Malay College Kuala Kangsar were also modelled on the Eton-Harrow boarding school tradition.

There were, of course, Islamic schools based on the Madrasah and the Al Azhar tradition. Although these were colonial and cultural models, the outcome was a mindset of graduates shaped by the weltanschauung (world views) of cultures and histories outside of Malaysia.

Malaysia inherited a system of education whose curriculum contents were the body of knowledge in all disciplines considered as worthwhile and shared throughout the British Commonwealth through the syllabuses of the Cambridge Examinations Certificate.

Although the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, (established in the 1970s) contributed to the existing knowledge with Malaysian perspectives, the mathematical, natural and social sciences remained universal in methodological and substantive contents.

Of all the institutions in society, the National Accreditation Council, which later became the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), contributed significantly to ensure the universal character of Malaysian higher education. The MQA has close relations with other quality assurance agencies of the world.

The contents as well as procedures of its quality assurance mechanisms, much like the International Organisation for Standardisation, promote and share quality standards which are universal in character.

The internationally recognised stringent protocols and credibility of this dynamic institution under professional leadership has contributed to establish Malaysian universities and their accredited programmes as world class institutions.

More than the political business of university rankings, the accreditations by MQA have placed Malaysian education on the world map. This institution, with its instruments of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation, Code of Practice for Institutional Audit and Programme Discipline Standards and Guides to Good Practices, has transformed the fledgling Malaysian higher education system into one of the leading systems in the world.

The celebration of five years of the MQA is a celebration of world class quality assurance and the universal character of Malaysian higher

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education in spite of the forces of parochialism.

Malaysian academicians who have contributed to the work of MQA as audit panellists or as the thousands of those who studied and wrote the contents of Quality Documents of their institutions, responding to MQA Quality Procedures, should be justly proud for contributing to make Malaysian higher education a brand of Malaysian excellence.



Those dedicated personnel and leadership of MQA have quietly and unobtrusively developed a quality culture which is second to none in spirit and in substance.



The TuanKu Syed Faizuddin Putra library at the main campus of Universiti Malaysia Perlis. The books in English in such libraries are evidence of the close intellectual and scholarly ties with the Western world.

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Writer is a deputy vice-chancellor, INTI Laureate International University

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