

Local colleges look for cheaper options

The sudden slide of the ringgit has left many students, especially those on twinning programmes, wondering how they are going to complete their studies. To help ease the financial burden, colleges are negotiating with the foreign universities on their twinning programmes to facilitate completion of the degree locally. Report by G. Shamala.

With the current high value of foreign currencies in respect to the ringgit, foreign education has become an extremely expensive choice, and many students are choosing against it.

The fact that local colleges are registering a drop in the number of students signing up for further studies is a sign of the times.

However, to ensure that students already in a course can complete it, local colleges are finding cheaper alternatives for their students.

Stamford College Berhad executive director of studies, Kumar Menon says the problem is a challenge to private colleges to overcome.

"The present situation robs students of their ambitions and in Stamford, those we spoke to said they decided not to go because of financial constraints."

A number of them, who intended to pursue degrees, have also had to settle for local diploma-level courses.

But a degree is valued much more than a diploma in the job market and is recognised as a minimum requirement for many jobs.

"Some diplomas, on the other hand, are not recognised by the government and the private sector," Kumar says, thus it would pose a problem to the students graduating with a diploma.

To help such students, he says a number of local private colleges are trying to negotiate with their twinning partners abroad to allow students to complete their final year locally. Some have agreed but with conditions.

"Recently, the government issued a policy statement which said private colleges can arrange with foreign universities to complete their degrees here," explained Kumar.

"We have spoken to the University of Northumbria, Newcastle which has agreed to a three-year business degree programme while we

are also negotiating with our Australian partner, the Edith Covan University, on allowing students to complete their education here for a whole range of studies like business, accounting and marketing," he says.

The foreign universities, however, are insisting on full fees, saying that the students are still saving on food, transport and accommodation costs which would otherwise be incurred.

"However, we find it difficult to accept their full fee argument as without some of the students going abroad to study, the question of their (the university's) own expenditure on each of our students does not arise.

"The fee should be lower and we are looking at the possibility of the students completing their final year here at between 50-60% of the present fees.

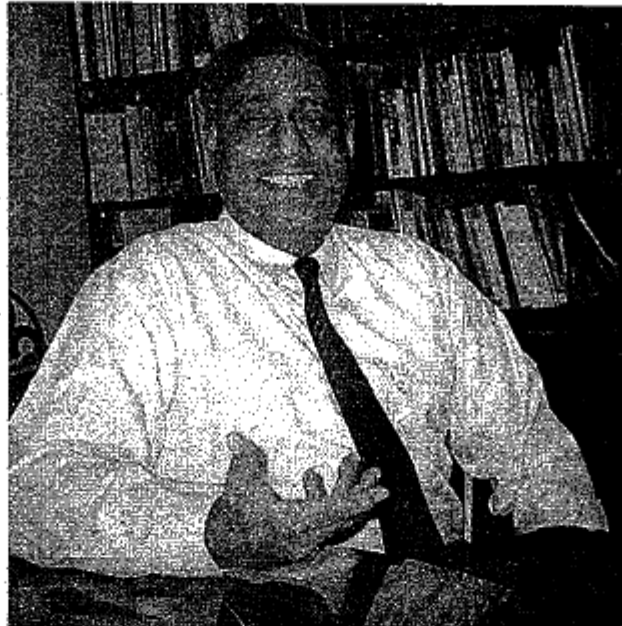
"The cost may vary from university to university but we are confident that some local colleges may be able to offer better rates. However, it really depends on the final fees agreed to by our counterparts," he says.

Kumar admits that there might be several problems with such an arrangement. "Will the foreign university agreeing to such arrangements recognise the degree here or will they compare it with what is offered for the same course in the home university?"

"Recognition must be awarded in either place as we also have to think of students who decide to continue with postgraduate studies later."

He adds that colleges, on their part, must ensure a qualified teaching staff as there are still shortcomings, especially in the highly specialised fields like engineering, medicine, dentistry and architecture.

"What is done here must match the quality and standards set abroad and one way to ensure this is to have frequent supervision by the



Kumar ... the present situation a challenge for private colleges.

foreign university concerned," he says.

He also urged professional bodies like the Institute of Engineers to recognise degree programmes offered locally as they presently only recognise local qualifications if the student has spent two years in universities abroad.

"They should become realistic and recognise directly without depending on recognition by foreign universities alone," says Kumar.

He feels that such organizations should participate in helping the students rather than staying out.

Meanwhile, Inti College president Tan Yew Seng believes that it is time for Malaysia to have its own brand product when it comes to education.

"The LCCI is an example of qualifications known worldwide and this comes from a good and proven track record.

"Why can't we have our own foundation studies which are sufficient for our students to go abroad without sitting for more qualifying papers from abroad?"

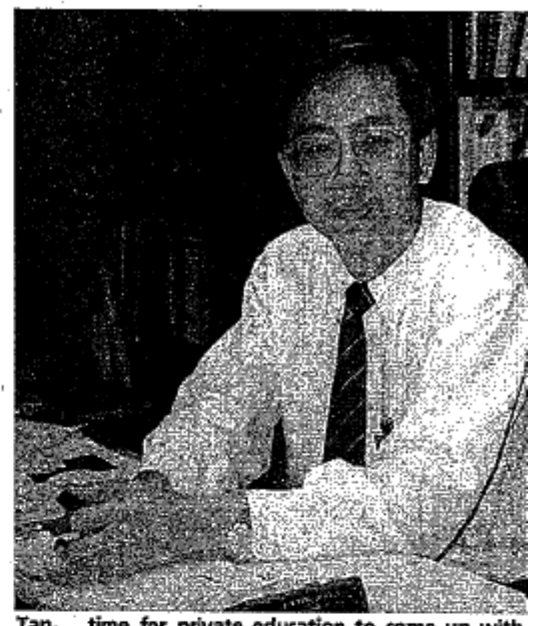
"This can replace present foreign exit qualification like the A-levels. By doing this, it not only cuts down your outflow but increases your inflow of money," he says, adding that this will also attract students from overseas and make Malaysia a regional centre of education.

Tan says private education in Malaysia should cross national boundaries and, as a start, Malaysia should export studies to other developing countries as it is well poised to provide that kind of lead.

For twinning students facing difficulties, he says the college is looking at the problem on a case-by-case basis and, wherever possible, arrangements are being made to allow them to spend more time here and less abroad.

"However, in cases like Masters and Ph.D studies, we may not be well-equipped and they simply have to go abroad," he says, adding that Inti has about 7,000 students studying in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand.

Taylor's College's programme director of tertiary



Tan ... time for private education to come up with brand product.

education, Dr Doh Joo Chien, says the college offers the American, British and Australian degree programmes and it is trying to find ways to make things less burdensome for the students.

"Our American programme requires them to study two years here and two more abroad but we are working towards three years here and one there as the short period abroad is still excellent exposure to them.

"For the British degree programme, we are trying to cut it down to one year there instead of two while we are also trying to get our Australian partner universities to agree to one and a half years there instead of two," he says.

However, those who really can not afford to go abroad at all can still obtain local degrees as some of Taylor's

students can opt for degree courses at the Tenaga Nasional Berhad and Telekom Malaysia universities.

Like the rest, Doh says Taylor's supports the government's policy of localized education.

"We hope that with the Education Ministry's blessing, we are moving towards tertiary education here and our commitment is in the form of a 650-acre Taylor's College International campus at the Kulim Technology Park," he says, adding that the college can contribute significantly to tertiary education soon.

PRIME College special projects director Kee E-Lene says the college has a special collaboration with Universiti Putra Malaysia where 17 courses like the Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Economics, Bach-

elor of Arts and Bachelor of Education will be of students from May 1998.

The programme students at PRIME complete their degree programmes at PRIME it be conferred with a from UPM without having to go abroad if they choose to.

In addition, the Associate Diploma (P) recognised entry to foreign universities.

Under the program after completing nine here, students have a of completing their in over 30 foreign universities abroad or at Un Putra Malaysia.

"Our PAD is recognised internationally as equivalent to the A-level qualifications and our students get placements in prestigious cities abroad," she says