

Editorial

HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

by: Lim Kee Jin

A serious problem faces any country that attempts to modernize itself through education of its citizens particularly in respect to tertiary education. Malaysia is now facing such a problem. Confronted by the urgent need to provide adequate numbers of university graduates to staff the expanding economy and bureaucracy, universities were created one after another in rapid succession until we now have 5 universities - the University of Malaya, the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan, the Institute Teknologi Kebangsaan and the Universiti Pertanian. I will not discuss the problems of obtaining staff, of building and finance which are themselves immense and which can be surmounted given goodwill and time. One serious problem is the imbalance between the numbers of arts and science graduates, there being a large predominance in arts graduates. Examples of student enrolment in the University of Malaya for 1973 illustrate this point.

Agriculture	322
Arts	3002
Econs. & Admin.	1478
Dentistry	62
Engineering	689
Science	1548
Law	103
Medicine	649
Education	598
Accountancy	68
Total:	8519

It is natural that more students should seek admission to arts and humanities courses for a variety of

reasons, partly on account of preference, partly because it is less intensive and more leisurely. Further, until recently, opportunities for advancement for the arts and humanities graduates have been better than science and technological graduates in Government service and the private sector.

Fewer students are attracted to the study of science largely because of lack of opportunities and facilities in many schools, particularly in rural areas and smaller towns. However, it is true to say that there is also a lack of interest among parents and teachers in encouraging students to take up science. While the Government is trying to persuade more students, particularly among the Malays, to take up science and technology, much more needs to be done through the mass media, through teachers and parents on a sustained basis. School heads should make greater efforts to stimulate the interest of their students by encouraging science societies and inviting scientists and technologists to actively participate in student activities. The quality of teaching of science and mathematics should also be improved and this is where the teachers have to take on the responsibility of making their subjects interesting and easy to understand.

We are also concerned that there seems to be an imbalance in the pattern of tertiary education, for there are more Universities than schools of technology and polytechnics. This, we fear, may give rise to a situation where there are more University graduates than what our economy can absorb, while at the same time, we find ourselves short of middle level technologists. That this problem is receiving the attention of Government is evidenced by the creation of the Higher Education

Advisory Council. We hope that this body will submit its recommendations early to Government and that its recommendations are given as wide a circulation as possible.

There should be a higher proportion of middle level technologists being trained as against University graduates and in order to achieve this, we consider that no new universities be created for the next few years. This will allow the existing Universities to consolidate and strengthen the existing disciplines.

Priority should be given to the formation of more polytechnics and middle level institutes of technology. This will permit a more rational approach to the development of the nation and avoid the pitfalls which some Asian countries have fallen into, of having a large surplus of University graduates, particularly in Arts and Humanities, who may be faced with lack of opportunities in employment, and who lack the training to equip them to survive in a free economy.