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## *Academic Exchange Schemes in Malaysia*

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Leong Yin Ching

### *Preliminary*

Earlier chapters have drawn attention to the principles underlying the globalisation of higher education, some of the policies and issues relevant to student exchange and some of the factors favouring or inhibiting it. The main perspectives have been those of universities of the South, while Section Four surveyed North-South student flows from the angle of countries and institutions in the North. This section returns to higher education institutions in the South and moves from analysis of student flows and reasons behind them to specific case studies. The following chapters highlight experiments and schemes designed to enhance student exchange. Malaysia has been chosen as the first example because of its successful record in very carefully planned, small-scale exchange programmes. This success is the more notable because, in contrast to many other Commonwealth universities, Malaysian higher education is mostly not conducted in English (English language was seen as a selling point by Canadian students).

### *The Malaysian educational system: Context for the cases*

The system of formal education in Malaysia basically comprises four levels, namely primary, secondary (lower and upper), post-secondary or Form VI and tertiary. Normally, primary schooling begins at the age of six and tertiary education system commences at the age of 19.

Children in Malaysia undergo six years of primary schooling (which

is free though not compulsory), either in the national schools, using the Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) or in Chinese-language or Tamil-language schools. On completion of primary schooling, pupils are promoted automatically to the lower secondary level, with pupils from the national primary schools moving directly into Form I, while those from Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools make the transition through a year of 'remove class' where they concentrate on improving their proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia. Following three years of lower secondary schooling, students take (from 1993) the Lower Secondary Evaluation (*Penilaian Menengah Rendah*). Based on their performance in this examination, students either proceed to two years of upper secondary education (in the academic, vocational or technical streams) or terminate their schooling. At the end of two years of upper secondary education, students take the Malaysian Certificate of Education (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/SPM*) or the Malaysian Certificate of Vocational Education (*Sijil Pelajaran Vokasional Malaysia/SPVM*).

Students who wish to pursue university education proceed to Form VI. Following the two years' course, students sit for the Malaysian Higher School Certificate (*Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia/STPM*) examination. There are alternative educational opportunities for students who do not wish to pursue a university education. Those with SPM or STPM may seek college level education in public or private institutions.

Higher education refers to all courses of study above Form VI which leads to the award of a degree, diploma or certificate. In the Malaysian context, such courses of study are largely provided by universities and college-level institutions under the control of the Ministry of Education. Private institutions are playing an increasing role in providing education at this level, but they have been excluded from the discussion in this chapter.

The first university in Malaysia, the University of Malaya (*Universiti Malaya*), was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1962, five years after independence, but its origins can be traced to the establishment of King Edward VI College of Medicine in 1905 and Raffles College in 1929. These colleges were amalgamated to form the nucleus of the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1949. In 1959, two divisions were established by the University, one in Kuala Lumpur and another in Singapore, the former becoming the University of Malaya in 1962, and the latter being renamed the University of Singapore, now the National University of Singapore.

With the achievement of independence in 1957, the Government

began to focus on the development of tertiary education to meet the manpower needs of the country. In 1962, the Higher Education Planning Committee was formed and its recommendations, incorporated in a report in 1967 (Malaysia, 1967) served as guidelines for the expansion of higher education for the period 1967-85. In line with the policy of enhancing integration among students in institutions of higher learning, a committee was formed to study campus life at the University of Malaya. In 1971, the Campus or Majid Report contained recommendations which aimed at rectifying the ethnic imbalance among university student population and enhancing the educational opportunities of *Bumiputeras* (Malays and other indigenous people) at the university level. These recommendations, with far reaching implications for the social mobility of the urban and, in particular, rural Malays through education, were adopted not only by the authorities of the University of Malaya but also by those responsible for the administration of the country's other universities established in 1969 and after.

Policy changes were also made with the adoption of the *Universities and University Colleges Act 1971*, which made the Ministry of Education responsible for the general direction of university education and the administration of the Act itself. Furthermore, government control was provided by the 1975 Amendment to the Act when additional heads of Government departments or their representatives were appointed to serve as council members of universities. This provision enabled the government to ensure that universities conformed to national policies and decisions made were co-ordinated.

University education has expanded very rapidly since 1969. Five new universities, together with a number of branch campuses, were established. University of Science Malaysia (*Universiti Sains Malaysia*), National University of Malaysia (*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*), University of Agriculture Malaysia (*Universiti Pertanian Malaysia*) and University of Technology Malaysia (*Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*) were founded in 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972 respectively, Northern University Malaysia (*Universiti Utara Malaysia*) was established in 1984. In addition, the government assisted in the founding of the International Islamic University (*Universiti Islam Antarabangsa*) in 1982.

To a significant extent, Bahasa Malaysia has replaced English as the medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning funded by the government. This has been accomplished in a series of planned phases whereby large numbers of staff and students have been provided with facilities to learn the language.

At the tertiary level, the importance of university education is

evident from the budget allocation it receives. Expenditure on university education has risen from M\$33.6 million (£1 = M\$5.0) in 1970 to M\$1,497 million in 1990, registering a thirty-fold increase. The proportion of total educational expenditure received by universities increased substantially from 7.1 per cent in 1970 to 26.3 per cent in 1990. Through financial grants and allocations, the government provides over 90 per cent of the income of local universities; hence its control of higher education in the country.

### *An overview of foreign students in Malaysian universities, 1986–90*

Malaysia has been a sending rather than a host country. In 1985, it was estimated that about 60,000 Malaysian students were enrolled in overseas tertiary educational institutions. Although there has been a decline (to about 52,000 in 1990), because of fee increases, higher living and travel costs, and local private institutions' offer of twinning arrangements with overseas universities, the number of students abroad remains very substantial.

In contrast, the number of foreign students in the seven Malaysian universities is insignificant. In any one of the years between 1986/87 and 1989/90 foreign students numbered no more than 466, or 0.8 per cent of the university population in the country. The largest single receiving institution was the International Islamic University. Unlike the others, which are funded almost entirely by the government of Malaysia, the International Islamic University is supported not only by Malaysia but also by co-sponsors abroad, namely the OIC, Bangladesh, Egypt, Libya, Maldives, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. This may explain, in part, the higher intake of foreign students from the co-sponsoring countries. Furthermore, almost all foreign undergraduates sponsored by the Malaysian government under the Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme are sent to the International Islamic University. Following that institution, the other two main hosts were the University of Agriculture, Malaysia and the University of Malaya.

Most of the incoming students pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies, but there are two cohorts of non-graduating students. One group follow courses in a Malaysian campus for a period of time in part fulfilment of the degree requirements in the sending country. Examples are: foreign medical students on attachment to the Faculty of Medicine as part of their elective programme; and overseas students following

Bahasa Malaysia courses at the Language Centre, to improve their language skills. The other group comprises overseas postgraduate candidates carrying out research or fieldwork.

What subjects attract foreigners studying in Malaysia for a qualification? Undergraduates were bunched together in Law (140, more than half at the International Islamic University) and Social Sciences and Humanities (91). Smaller numbers appeared for Science (26), Economics, Public and Business Administration (24) and Islamic Studies (20). The figures relate to the four years between 1986 and 1990. No foreign undergraduates were enrolled in disciplines such as Computer Science, Accounting and Quantitative Studies. Foreign postgraduates are more likely to be registered for a Master's than a doctoral programme and a relatively high proportion (15 to 19 per cent between 1986 and 1990) were working in Agriculture and related subjects.

The flow of foreign *undergraduates* is mainly from the member countries of ASEAN, mainly Singapore (22.1 per cent of the total ASEAN cohort), Brunei (15.3 per cent), Indonesia (8.4 per cent), Thailand (4.7 per cent) and Philippines (2.3 per cent). The ASEAN students made up over half of the foreign undergraduates in the years to 1986 to 1990. The rest of the intake is mainly from other developing countries in Asia and Africa, with an annual average of 3.4 per cent from Japan, China and Hong Kong and of only 1.8 per cent from the post-industrial countries. Foreign *postgraduates* are mainly concentrated in the University of Malaya, probably because, as the oldest established institution it has placed greater emphasis on postgraduate work in the development process, with its Institute of Advanced Studies. As with foreign undergraduates, the largest number of foreign postgraduates (44.9 per cent on average) came from the ASEAN countries. Japanese and Korean postgraduates made up another 13.6 per cent, while the UK, Australia, Canada, USA, France and Germany were countries of origin for another 11.5 per cent. The numbers of *non-graduating students* remain small – the highest recorded in the years under review was 56 in 1989–90.

### ***Influences on the flow of students from abroad to Malaysia***

The overview of foreign students in Malaysian universities indicates that the number involved is too small to have much of an impact on the university population. This low inflow of students from abroad may be influenced by factors such as university admissions policy, the local

demand for higher education, language issue, provision of learning and teaching facilities, particularly at the postgraduate level, availability of accommodation and forging of academic exchange schemes.

Admission to Malaysian universities is based on a number of criteria, among which are academic achievement and ethnic origin. The pursuit of an ethnicity biased admissions policy to ensure that university enrolment reflects the ethnic composition of the population, not only by the university as a whole but also by faculty, in view of the government's policy to channel Bumiputeras to courses in science and technology. Preference for admission to Malaysian universities is first given to Malaysian citizens, followed by individuals with permanent resident status and foreigners. Furthermore, foreign applicants from countries such as Israel, South Africa, Cuba and until recently, China are hardly given any consideration in view of Malaysia's stand against the practices of apartheid and communism.

The demand for places in higher education on the part of young Malaysians is also a factor which inhibits the intake of foreign students into Malaysian campuses. This insatiable appetite for higher education is reflected in the higher percentage of rejected applications with the necessary qualifications for admission to institutions of higher learning. The rejection rate varied from 65 per cent in 1981 to 81 per cent in 1985 at the undergraduate level (Vijesuriar, 1988). Higher education is desirable because of its financial rewards at the personal level. It also bestows social status and prestige on the individual. From the viewpoint of society, higher education is perceived as the major tool in the process of restructuring society towards achieving greater economic and social balances between ethnic groups.

Another prominent factor which influences the flow of foreign students from abroad is the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in the national education system, beginning with Standard I in 1970. This means that a foreign student is required to have an adequate knowledge of Bahasa Malaysia to be able to follow the lectures and other course requirements. The language problem is, however, surmountable. Facilities are available in the Language Centres to equip the foreign student with a working knowledge of Bahasa Malaysia. In the Language Centre at the University of Malaya, for example, two types of Bahasa Malaysia courses are available. While the first type consists of classes organised over a full academic year, the second type involves an intensive course during the University's vacation. The intensive course is of a duration of six weeks and lectures are given four hours per day over a period of five days per week.

Classes in the intensive course are organised at the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

At the postgraduate level, however, some of the courses are conducted in English with the approval of the Ministry of Education. This option of using Bahasa Malaysia or English is also extended to the writing of theses or dissertations as part fulfilment of the Master's or Ph.D. programme. The use of the English language at the postgraduate level could have accounted for the higher proportion of foreign post-graduates.

Malaysian universities are relatively new, and the newest among them would require time and resources to establish their teaching, research and publication programmes to meet initially the needs of Malaysians. The Northern University Malaysia, for example, does not have any foreign students among its population. With regard to the more established local universities, there is a need to publicise the disciplines or areas of study in which they have the expertise and resources to cater not only to Malaysians but also to foreign students and scholars. Even though Bahasa Malaysia is the official language, efforts could be made to publish university calendars, handbooks and guide-books in English for dissemination to countries overseas. Early chapters in this book have made it plain that lack of information to foreign students and scholars is a limiting factor in their choice of universities for overseas studies and research.

Another limitation, which has also been mentioned earlier, is the lack of student and staff accommodation, especially for those with families. Foreign students need to adjust to the socio-cultural way of life of Malaysians, including their culinary tastes. Living in colleges leads to mutual learning in interaction and socio-cultural experiences are as important as academic interchanges. In the University of Agriculture Malaysia, some foreign students are housed with local undergraduates on a shared-room basis. Others find accommodation outside the university, an arrangement which may not provide adequate opportunities for socio-cultural exchanges.

Mechanisms like Commonwealth scholarship and fellowship plans, teacher exchanges and links between institutions play an important role in promoting intra-Commonwealth student flows. In the 1960s and 1970s, Malaysia made use of these mechanisms to train its urgently needed middle and high-level skilled manpower to meet its ambitious development plans. It was only in the 1980s that Malaysia began to reciprocate. Student flows from abroad are now seen to provide the opportunity for Malaysians to interact with students, scholars and

researchers from different parts of the world. Interaction of this kind leads to a better understanding of people of different political ideologies, socio-economic backgrounds and cultural values. Hence the interest in some reverse flow. The country has now begun to forge academic exchange programmes and link schemes that would reverse the flow and promote the intake of foreign students and scholars to Malaysian universities, albeit the pace is a gradual one.

The rest of this chapter gives a description of these schemes.

### *Academic exchange schemes*

Some academic exchange schemes are the product (or by-product) of cultural and bilateral negotiations and subsequent agreements between individual developed and developing countries and Malaysia. These bilateral schemes are further enhanced by additional scholarships, awards and fellowships granted by various international and regional agencies. Other exchange schemes are negotiated between individual universities in Malaysia and overseas institutions of higher learning. Schemes discussed are those found in the University of Malaya, University of Agriculture Malaysia and the International Islamic University. Besides exchange schemes for students, a brief account is given of link schemes which facilitate the movement of teaching staff of overseas universities to Malaysian campuses. Supporting structures (immigration and work facilities) and services (fee waivers and subsidies, accommodation and counselling services) are discussed.

Malaysia provides technical assistance to developing countries under the *Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme* (MTCP). Its emphasis is on the development of human resources through training and the sharing of Malaysian experience and expertise in the development process. Between 1986 and 1990, technical assistance has been given to 46 countries and the amount disbursed is M\$29 million. In emphasising human resource development, MTCP makes available to applicants both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Malaysian universities. At the undergraduate level, a majority of the candidates are sent to the International Islamic University. The emphasis, however, is on postgraduate studies involving Master's and doctorate courses. By the end of 1988, 1,318 trainees were awarded fellowships to undertake academic and practical training in local universities and training institutions. A total of five universities and 17 public agencies and training institutions were involved in the programme.

Under the MTCP programme, all tuition fees are paid for.

Candidates are given living allowances (M\$450–M\$650 monthly), while other allowances are for textbooks (M\$200–M\$250 per annum), thesis (M\$450–M\$650 throughout the course), practical training (M\$10 per diem at places outside a radius of 25km from the training institution concerned) and travel (round-trip economy class air travel, once at the beginning and once at the end of the course, and M\$200 per annum for travelling within Malaysia). A family allowance equivalent to 30.0 per cent of the monthly maintenance allowance may be given to participants who are permitted to bring their families. Expenses for medical and dental treatment in government hospitals and clinics are borne by the Malaysian government. Payment of allowances is made by the Training and Career Development Division, Public Services Department, Malaysia through the training institution concerned.

The MTCP is generous in its sponsorship of foreign undergraduate and postgraduate students from developing countries to Malaysian universities. The period of sponsorship is for the duration of the course, which varies from two to three years. Some of the areas of study offered to meet the development needs of sending countries are Economics, Public Administration, Business Administration, Law, Agriculture and Applied Science. The continuation of awards is based on satisfactory progress made by the candidates. The candidates are required to return to their home countries on completion of their studies.

*Student exchange schemes* University of Malaya Interviews with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya and the Deans of selected faculties with foreign students among its population showed that keen support has been given to the idea of internationalising higher education, particularly at the postgraduate level. Hopes were expressed that the intake of foreign students could be increased. The Vice-Chancellor's personal opinion was that at least five per cent of the student population as a whole should be foreigners, to provide a visible impact. Others voiced the opinion that some faculties had the capacity to accommodate between 10 and 20 per cent of foreign students at the postgraduate level. It is therefore of interest to report on the schemes through which foreign students are enrolled at the University of Malaya. The objective is to examine existing schemes of exchange and highlight components which have contributed to their success.

The intake of foreign students for the 1990–91 session is used to illustrate the schemes through which they have been enrolled at the University of Malaya. Of the total of 99 foreign students pursuing Masters and Ph.D. degrees on a full-time basis, 39.4 per cent are non-graduating students at the undergraduate level, four per cent are

undertaking first degree courses, four per cent are non-graduating research students at the postgraduate level and three per cent are researchers with academic staff status. More than two-thirds of the foreign students are self-financing, 13.1 per cent are sponsored by national and international agencies, 11 per cent are recipients of government scholarships, 3.1 per cent are on a link scheme and the remaining 3.1 per cent are sponsored by the MTCP.

Of particular interest is the 3.1 per cent of foreign students who have been enrolled in the University of Malaya through a link scheme as non-graduating students at the undergraduate level in the 1990-91 session. This link scheme between the University of Hull and the University of Malaya was established in 1989. Specifically, the link is between the Centre for South-East Asian Studies at the University of Hull and the University of Malaya's Department of South-East Asian Studies of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences together with the Department of Malay Language of its Language Centre. While nine British students participated in the programme abroad in 1990 (six in the University of Science Malaysia and three in the University of Malaya) 18 British students spent a year abroad in 1991 (eight in the University of Science Malaysia and 10 in the University of Malaya).

The BA Special Degree in South-East Asian Studies and Language, conferred by the University of Hull, is a three-year programme. Besides courses on South-East Asian History, Politics, Economics and Culture, undergraduates are required to follow the course 'Basic Malay' in their first year and 'Malay Language' in their second year. At the end of the second year, the undergraduates spend a study year abroad in Malaysia to improve their Malay and gather materials for a written project.

Although a formal evaluation of the link scheme has yet to be carried out, its implementation has been considered a success by the academic staff concerned. A number of factors has contributed. First, the eligibility of undergraduates in the University of Hull to apply for financial grants minimises the costs of living abroad. Secondly, the undergraduates have considerable knowledge of the Malay language prior to their arrival in Malaysia, having followed classes in Malay for a two-year period in Hull. This knowledge is further enhanced in the Malay proficiency course organised by the Language Centre at the University of Malay. Here, the undergraduates from Hull attend Malay classes with the local students and class-size is kept to a maximum of 15 to allow for individual attention. Besides the lecture approach, the audio-laboratory teaching method is used. Efforts are also made to house the British

undergraduates in residential halls where they can interact with the local students and be exposed to the Malaysian way of life. During the vacation, the undergraduates visit different parts of the country to observe how Malaysian society operates, as well as to collect materials for their written projects.

The successful implementation of the link scheme for students seems to have prompted the Head of the Department of South-East Asian Studies at the University of Malaya to visit the centre in Hull, in February 1991, to discuss an exchange programme involving academic staff members. The focus is to be on collaborative research and writing projects between the two departments of South-East Asian studies and negotiation was still in progress at the time of writing. As a first step, a general multi-disciplinary teaching text on South-East Asia has been planned.

Another scheme links the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya with overseas medical schools. The medical curriculum, in general, provides for elective subjects from the fourth year of the course, one of which requires the student to undertake a project at a medical school overseas while on attachment for a period for four to eight weeks. Although the undergraduates come from medical schools in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Germany and India, they are, in the main, Malaysian students studying medicine overseas who have opted for an attachment to the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya.

A memorandum of understanding on an academic exchange programme between the Rouen Graduate School of Business and the University of Malaya has been drawn up. The University of Malaya will send undergraduate and postgraduate business students to the Rouen Graduate School of Business to undertake academic courses or carry out research projects supervised by the faculty there. To reciprocate, the Rouen Graduate School of Business will select and send postgraduate students to the Faculty of Economics and Administration to attend the Masters of Business Administration programme. Both parties will assess the performance of students and submit marks or grades for academic courses taken. The exchange student will pay tuition fees to the home institution only and the host institution will undertake to waive all fees for exchange students. The costs of transport, room and board during the period of stay at the host institution will, however, be borne by the exchange students. Efforts will be made to exchange faculty members between the two institutions. The terms of the exchange programme are to be reviewed at the end of the three years.

Foreign students are also found at the University of Malaya as part of a study or tour group. The duration of the visit may vary from a day to a week, depending on the objectives of the study tour. Normally, lectures or informal talks on Malaysia are organised to meet the needs and interests of the tour group. Countries which have sent their students to the University of Malaya as members of a tour group are Australia, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand.

*Student exchange schemes* University of Agriculture Malaysia A large majority of the foreign students at the University of Agriculture Malaysia are from the ASEAN countries and Africa. Almost 90 per cent of the foreign postgraduate students are the recipients of scholarships from the government or agencies such as WINROCK International, Southeast Asean Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management, International Development Research Centre, United States Agency for International Development, Japan International Co-operation Agency and the Malaysian Technical Co-operation Programme.

In an effort to foster linkages with other academic institutions, the University of Agriculture Malaysia has established co-operative graduate programmes. Under such an arrangement, joint graduate programmes between the University and other institutions, local or foreign, can be structured for graduate students. Students may carry out part of the graduate work at the collaborating university and complete the degree requirements at the University or vice-versa. The degree will be awarded by the institution which initiated the programme. An example of a co-operative graduate scheme is the operation of a consortium of universities made up of: the University of Agriculture Malaysia; Kasertsart University in Thailand; Institute of Bogor, Indonesia; Institute of Technology, Bandung, and University of Philippines at Los Banos. Under this scheme, a postgraduate student can follow courses in Kasertsart University and carry out research at the University of Agriculture Malaysia. The Deans of the graduate schools involved meet once a year to evaluate the co-operative graduate programme.

Depending on the availability of research funds, the University also provides graduate assistantship. The scheme, started in 1988, attempts to recruit foreign students to the University's research programme. Besides research, the graduate assistant gives six hours of tutorials weekly. Under the programme, the graduate assistants are given certain fee exemption and a monthly stipend of M\$800.

Officials of this university too expressed positive opinions on the need to internationalise the postgraduate programme further. At present, postgraduate studies are conducted in English. About 70 per cent of the staff have been trained in America and England. They have the local expertise in agriculture and related fields, especially in plantation crops.

*The International Islamic University* As already indicated, the International Islamic University has the highest proportion of non-Malaysians among the seven local universities. The university population includes students from 52 Muslim countries. The university has been urged to take in more non-Muslim students to promote greater understanding about Islam. Almost all foreign undergraduates sponsored by the Malaysian government under the MTCP are sent to the International Islamic University partly because the medium of instruction is English.

At present, there are no student exchange schemes at the International Islamic University. Foreign students who are not sponsored by their governments or agencies pay the university fees on their own. Two types of fees are charged, namely, full fees of US\$2,025 and subsidised fees of about US\$700. The subsidised fees are for foreign students from the developing countries.

Malaysians constitute a large majority of the academic staff of local universities. They make up 94.1 per cent (while foreigners constitute 5.9 per cent only) of the teaching staff of the University of Malaya, National University Malaysia, University of Agriculture Malaysia and the International Islamic University. Foreign lecturers are normally employed on a contract basis.

Although requests have been received by some of the local universities to initiate faculty exchange, formalised schemes are few in number. Practical problems relate to local staff situations such as shortage of lecturers in specific disciplines like Medicine and Engineering, and time scheduling of visits. These problems may have inhibited the development of staff exchange schemes.

The exchange programme between British and Malaysian universities organised through the Committee for International Co-operation in Higher Education (CICHE) is an example of a successful staff exchange programme. British and Malaysian academic staff work jointly on research and publication projects which have been identified by the Malaysian partners. The CICHE provides funds to cover travel, accommodation and subsistence costs for Malaysian staff members to visit Britain and vice-versa.

Another example is the special bilateral exchange programme between the Japan Society for the promotion of Science (JSPS) with South-east Asian countries. Its activities cover all the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities, and Natural and Applied Sciences, although the primary focus is on Basic Science. Co-operative research projects are undertaken between Japanese and Malaysian academic staff through the Vice-Chancellor's Council of National Universities in Malaysia.

### *Support structures*

Gaining admission to a Malaysian university of one's choice is but the first step in the preparation to leave the home country for Malaysia. There is the need to obtain visas and student passes. In the Malaysian context, it has been commented that:

... no one has been denied educational opportunities because of visa or immigration restrictions.

Clearance has to be obtained from the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, Ministry of Home Affairs and the Immigration Department Malaysia before the formal offer of a university place is conveyed to the foreign student. The clearance process normally takes between four and six months. As a result, about 90 per cent of the foreign students register with the host institution without a student pass. Meanwhile, a social visit pass is applied for, together with a letter of sponsorship. Where the student is sponsored by the government or an agency, the host institution stands as the local sponsor. Otherwise, the student has to obtain a local sponsor on his or her own.

In addition to a student pass, the foreign research student or staff has to obtain clearance from the Socio-Economic and Research Unit (SERU) of the Prime Minister's Department. Clearance is given when the research proposal submitted by the researcher is approved by SERU. Foreign undergraduates and postgraduates are not permitted to seek employment in the course of their stay in Malaysia. Thus they have to ensure that they have sufficient funds to complete the courses. Researchers are required to obtain work permits if they seek employment.

*Support services* A foreign student's period of study in the local universities can be maximised if there are sufficient support services, particularly at the initial stages of his stay in Malaysia. Some of these have been discussed earlier in this book. They include fee waivers, fee subsidies, accommodation and guidance and counselling sessions.

In Malaysia, a Vice-Chancellor can exercise his discretion in exempting a student from paying tuition fees. Normally, exemption from fees is granted under very special circumstances only. At the moment, tuition fees in Malaysian universities are comparatively low. This is because education costs at the tertiary level are heavily subsidised by the Malaysian government to enhance educational opportunity and accessibility.

Providing sufficient and adequate accommodation on campus for students and visitors remains a problem. In the University of Malaya, for example, the nine hostels within the campus and two hostels outside the campus provide accommodation for only half its total student population. *Rumah Universiti* (the University House) has accommodation for six visitors only. Additional hostels have been requested under the Sixth Malaysia Plan.

Another important service for both local and foreign students is the provision of guidance and counselling services. Such services are normally provided by the Student Affairs Department. The ratio of counsellors to students has to be improved for more effective consultation and counselling. At the University of Malaya, for example, the two counsellors have to cope with a student population of about 10,000.

## *Conclusion*

It appears that there is no basic policy with regard to the intake of foreign students into Malaysian universities on a national or an institutional basis. Perhaps, the number of foreign students in Malaysian universities has been, over the years, too low to warrant a statement of policy. At the same time, admitting foreign students based primarily on academic achievement but on an *ad hoc* basis may not contribute to the full realisation of benefits which could accrue from their presence in Malaysian universities.

It may well be that the best way forward is through the judicious expansion of special programmes of the types which have been described in this chapter. They have been notably successful and benefits have been perceived on both sides.