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Critical thinking puts grads ahead

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SEREMBAN: Proficiency in English and the ability to think critically are the characteristics most sought after by potential employers, a recent survey by Universiti Putra Malaysia has revealed.

Its vice-chancellor, Prof Datuk Dr Nik Mustapha R. Abdullah, said critical thinking ability topped the list, while a strong command of the English language came in second.

"An employee with these

characteristics is an asset to an organisation.

"Our survey revealed that a fresh graduate with these qualities will have more opportunities compared with others," he said after opening the Seventh Malaysian International Conference on English Language Teaching (MICELT) here yesterday.

He said these were the findings of a recent survey conducted by UPM's alumni centre involving more than 4,000 fresh graduates.

"A student who lacks a strong command of the En-

glish language is often deemed mediocre.

"Fortunately, students are becoming increasingly aware of this and universities are also playing their part in helping students improve their language skills."

On its part, he said UPM was the first university in the country to offer a bachelor in education degree in the Teaching of English as a Second Language programme (TESL).

He said universities must produce graduates who are well-rounded.

They should be able to fit in-

to and contribute effectively to society and possess an edge over competitors.

"Without the ability to speak and write effectively in English, these graduates would find themselves severely

handicapped."

Also present was Higher Education Ministry deputy director-general (public universities sector) Datuk Prof Mohd Yusof Kassim, who represented minister Datuk Khaled Nordin.

Khaled, in his speech read by Mohd Yusof, said competency in English was an inte-

gral element in the success of the ministry's National Higher Education Plan.

"Critical thinking, good communication skills, proficiency in English and enhanced IT skills must form the foundation for all graduates, regardless of which discipline they are in."

In future, he said these skills would be incorporated into a curriculum which would run concurrently with degree programmes at all higher education institutions.

He did not elaborate on how this was to be done and when

it would take effect.

MICELT, which was first organised 14 years ago, was the country's premier conference in English language teaching.

Among the participants yesterday were internationally recognised speakers such as Prof Bonny Norton (University of British Columbia, Canada), Prof Joan Jamieson (Northern Arizona University, USA) and Prof Liz Hamp-Lyons (University of Nottingham, the United Kingdom).

The event was organised by UPM's Educational Studies Faculty.