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# Public varsities to mentor cluster schools

Plan will boost continuity in education system

**TAN SHIOW CHIN**

**PUTRAJAYA:** Public universities will be adopting cluster schools to enhance continuity within the national education system.

All 20 public universities and 60 cluster schools in the country will be involved in this programme jointly organised by the Education and Higher Education Ministries.

According to Education secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Zulkurnain Awang, the universities and schools will be paired up according to their respective niche areas and geographical proximity.

His Higher Education counterpart, Datuk Dr Zulkefli A. Hassan, said: "As our universities are located everywhere, the distribution is equitable in every state."

"If the programme is successful, it can even be extended to other schools," he said, adding that the initiative could include private universities as well.

Dr Zulkefli said that school students are expected to gain an increased awareness of advanced fields of study like nanotechnology and aerospace engineering, early exposure to research via joint research projects with university lecturers and the usage of university facilities like libraries.

"This programme will also help us identify and nurture students with strong potential to fulfil our aim of having about 100,000 PhD holders in 15 years under the MyBrain15 programme in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan," he said.

In addition, Dr Zulkefli hopes that through this initiative, two important factors in graduate employability – command of the English language and entrepreneurial skills – can be addressed and inculcated at an earlier stage.

» This will help us identify students with potential to fulfil our aim of 100,000 PhD holders in 15 years«



DATUK DR ZULKEFLI A. HASSAN

Dr Zulkurnain said that university lecturers could help enhance both academic and co-curricular activities for both school students and teachers.

"This will not only add value to the school system, but will also increase the awareness of lecturers as to what is going on in schools and further enhance their own teaching at the tertiary level.

"I hope that this can even improve the teaching and learning process, because universities produce teachers for secondary schools," he said, adding that through this programme, universities will be made aware of the real needs of schools.

Dr Zulkefli said the universities and the schools themselves will decide on the exact nature of the programmes.

The programme will be officially launched by both the respective ministers at the 2008 Higher Education Ministry and Education Ministry Cooperation Seminar at Universiti Putra Malaysia on Tuesday.