

Going private in a public uni

For the first time, a local public university grants autonomy to one of its faculties.

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THE PUTRA Business school, has become the first private entity within a public university.

Formerly known as Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Graduate School of Management, it received autonomy following its accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB).

The AACSB is an esteemed United States higher education business accreditation body.

UPM vice-chancellor Datuk Dr Radin Umar Radin Sohadi said it was only natural for faculties that show excellent academic results and exemplary performance to be awarded such autonomy.

"The government had earlier given autonomy to varsities that were deemed 'fit', so when their faculties are ready for autonomy, they should also receive it," he said.

An AACSB accreditation means that the accredited business school is capable of delivering what it offers to students. In order to determine the business school's competence, a very strict process was put in place by the AACSB to assess the faculty, said Assoc Prof Dr Arfah Salleh, PBS president and CEO.

"The toughest part of the accreditation process was probably the assurance of learning assessment, where AACSB representatives monitored our teaching and learning techniques both inside and outside the classroom. "The reason why the assessment had been so difficult was because it had taken into account the actual involvement of lecturers.

"They were scrutinised to determine how committed they were in imparting their knowledge to students. This observation of the human element required our faculty members to be top notch in order to pass," she said.

Dr Arfah added that the stringent evaluation system was direct but its in-depth and detailed look into how the business school was run, made it a tough test to pass.

"The standards AACSB set are very high, that's why it usually takes five to eight years to get the accreditation. We're very lucky we



Sealed deal: Mohamed Khaled (second from right) witnessing Fernandes presenting a token of appreciation to Dr Arfah. Looking on are Dr Radin Umar and AACSB International senior vice-president and Asia chief officer Eileen Peacock.

nailed it on the fifth year.

"There are many other institutions that applied for accreditation earlier than we did but have yet to receive it. We're very grateful for our success and the dedication of our school," she said.

The PBS was not the only body within the varsity to gain AACSB recognition, UPM's Faculty of Economics and Management also received accreditation.

AACSB International President and CEO John Fernandes congratulated the heads of both UPM's undergraduate and postgraduate business programmes, Prof Mohd Shahwahid Othman and Dr Arfah respectively. "This accreditation means that the elite business schools of the world recognise UPM as a peer.

UPM can be proud that it is the first Malaysian institution to be accredited," he said.

Fernandes acknowledged that going through the process of accreditation by the AACSB might have hurt a little but it was a

necessary challenge to guarantee that UPM's business school delivered on its promises.

"Since UPM's business school is the first to receive accreditation in Malaysia, we hope that it becomes a leader and an example to other local business schools seeking an AACSB accreditation," he said.

Also on hand to witness the accreditation ceremony was Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin. He said the approval for PBS to operate as an independent licensed business school from the ministry made it a first-of-its-kind business school in Malaysia.

"The PBS is the first private entity within a public university in Malaysia. "Fewer than five percent of all business programmes worldwide enjoy the AACSB accreditation and it shows Malaysian higher education is on par internationally," said Mohamed Khaled.

PBS offered a unique postgraduate business programme, said Dr Arfah adding that it was different from its peers as it was based

on the concept of human governance and a curriculum that moved away from traditional Eurocentric western models.

"We challenge existing world views and assumptions on business and management. We believe inner human values are key to steering corporations in the right direction.

"These values and principles are far more effective in regulating organisations than rule-based governance systems. It also ensures that leaders of organisations take responsibility for their actions instead of lumping them on the 'abstract legal entity' that is the corporation," she added.

She said that current trends in business management needed to change in order to progress and reverse global economic stagnation. One of the ways to do that was to look at manpower from a different perspective.

"We have to stop looking at human beings as simply resources to be exploited and start looking at their potential for greatness," added Dr Arfah.