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Parameters of autonomous status

ZULITA MUSTAFA
zulita@nst.com.my

UNIVERSITY autonomy is defined as the devolution of major decisions previously made by central agencies such as the Treasury, Public Service Department, Higher Education Ministry and Malaysian Qualifications Agency to the governing board of the respective universities that will contribute significantly towards achieving excellence.

It requires accountability in managing resources in four main areas, namely institutional governance, finance, human resource as well as academic and student enrolment.

The first principle area involves the board of directors and governance board of the university. The two boards are key decision makers in the university subject to government regulations and directives.

The boards manage and utilise the university's generated revenues by implementing internal rules and procedures.

The autonomous status also enables the boards to approve the establishment of a faculty or centre as well as new programmes which are not under the purview of the government.

Higher Education Department director-general Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir said the boards of directors of autonomous universities are empowered to approve internal allocations for the establishment of the faculty, centre and programmes.

New programmes, however, still need to be accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

To enable public universities to be granted autonomous status, the Higher Education Ministry conducted a series of audits to evaluate their readiness.

In 2012 and 2013, seven public tertiary institutions obtained autonomous status with another six in 2014 and 2015.

Today, all 20 public universities have autonomous status. The last six public universities — Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia, Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris, and Universiti Malaysia Sabah — were recently granted autonomous status after passing a re-audit exercise. **(See infographics on page 30)** **MORE ON PAGES 30 & 31**



Managing autonomous status

FROM PAGE 29

THE public universities autonomous programme was introduced in 2012 under the National Higher Education Strategic Plan in a paradigm shift towards more effective tertiary education management.

The delegation of power between the universities and other central agencies was conducted in stages.

In his New Year's speech in 2012, then Higher Education Minister Datuk Mohamed Khaled Nordin announced that the five oldest public universities in the country, would be granted autonomous status to self-govern, manage finances and generate sources of income.

They can manage their resources including hiring and firing staff, and have full control over the academic management of the institution including student intakes, provided that the universities succeeded in meeting the mark after an audit as set by the Code of University Good Governance and University Good Governance Index.

Siti Hamisah said the autonomous status improves competitiveness and performance of public universities by giving them more flexibility in decision-making and to devise and implement their own strategies without government over-regulation, political interference and micromanagement.

"It is very much the university's prerogative privilege to engage in any strategic decision-making process including engagement in entrepreneurial activities, adapting to changing external demands, attracting and retaining quality staff, and creating incentives for developing research strategies and portfolios.

"This status will also bring back and expand the university's traditional functions of teaching, research, scholarship and innovation to meet the wide-ranging needs of globally connected knowledge societies."

EXPECTATIONS

Siti Hamisah added that the power of public universities to manage their resources is not absolute and is subject to the government and ministry's policies and strategies.

For example, universities must adhere to circulars by the Treasury, with the chairman of the university's board of directors as the authority to assume the role of the Treasury in protecting the interests of the government.

"Therefore, certain key performance indexes (KPIs), which include the universities generating 20 to 30 per cent of their income by 2020, were established to monitor the performance of public universities.

"This is to reduce dependency on the government and to empower public universities



The best university, according to international standards, is one which benefits local and international communities in a sustainable way.

SITI HAMISAH TAPSIR
Higher Education
Department director-general



in accomplishing greater success."

Another KPI assesses the rates of graduate employability where 80 per cent have to be employed within one year upon graduation.

Public universities are expected to contribute significantly to the country's aim to become a high-income economy by producing highly competent graduates and commercialising research output.

"The ministry promotes the role of academicians in pushing the frontiers of knowledge

as well as creating new value and contributing to economic growth. With autonomy, we expect the universities to respond to societal expectations which is not only crucial to the new era of higher education ecosystems but also to the achievement of educational excellence, innovation and internationalisation in the technology convergence era.

"The best university, according to international standards, is one which benefits local and international communities in a sustainable way."

UNIVERSITIES WITH AUTONOMOUS STATUS

Year granted	Universities
2012 / 2013	1. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia 2. University of Malaya 3. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 4. Universiti Sains Malaysia 5. Universiti Putra Malaysia 6. Universiti Utara Malaysia 7. International Islamic University of Malaysia
2014 / 2015	8. Universiti Malaysia Sarawak 9. Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia 10. Universiti Teknikal Melaka 11. Universiti Teknologi Mara 12. Universiti Malaysia Terengganu 13. Universiti Malaysia Pahang 14. Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia
2018	15. Universiti Malaysia Perlis 16. Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin 17. Universiti Malaysia Kelantan 18. Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia 19. Universiti Perguruan Sultan Idris 20. Universiti Malaysia Sabah

The autonomous status creates incentives for developing research strategies.





Universities with autonomous status can independently introduce new programmes subject to accreditation by MQA.

More responsive to needs and priorities

ONE of the oldest universities in the country, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was granted autonomous status in 2012.

UKM deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) Professor Datuk Dr Marzuki Mustafa said with the power granted to the university's board of directors and governors, the tertiary institution has the right to make its own decisions as long as it follows regulations.

"In general, it empowers the board to manage the university independently. Since the university is mainly funded by the government, it follows government policies and rulings related to finance and human resources.

"But instead of being monitored by the government, this role is mainly taken up by the university board," he added.

With autonomous status, universities are able to respond more effectively to their needs and priorities.

"It allows us to plan and manage the operations of the university in line with its strategy, mission and vision.

"With the proposed revision of the University and University Colleges Act, more power will be given to the board especially on the appointment of top management."

Marzuki hoped that financial management of funds generated by the university will not be subject to Treas-



Mohd Marzuki Mustafa (right) speaking to members of the Malaysian International Nanotechnology Olympiad team which won a competition in Tehran, Iran. UKM has always encouraged its students to compete in the global arena.

ury ruling.

"While we already enjoy significant autonomy in academic matters, greater independence is welcome.

"The challenge now is for the university to generate more wealth to be financially less dependent on the government."

But even with autonomous status, there is still room for the university to push for scholarly excellence, be more impactful in its core activities and be more entrepreneurial in running the institution.

"We are drawing up a long-term plan with several strategic initiatives for wealth creation."

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vice-chancellor Professor Datin Padu-

ka Datuk Aini Ideris said with autonomous status, UPM accredits its own programmes, following Malaysian Qualifications Agency guidelines.

Committees at UPM audit the programmes before seeking the senate's approval.

"For good governance, experts from other tertiary institutions form part of the committees."

Aini, who was UPM deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) from December 2008 to November 2013, is instrumental in the preparation for university autonomy and various other initiatives in relation to improvements to the curriculum, teaching and learning at the university. UPM was granted the status on Jan 26, 2012.

UNIVERSITI Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Zul Azhar Zahid Jamal said with the recently acquired autonomous status, the tertiary institution is given the opportunity to determine its strategic direction and has freedom to voice its opinions.

He said the university's board members have always worked hand-in-hand with the management to propel the institution to excellence.

Established in 2001, UniMAP is the country's 17th public university. Originally known as Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia, it was renamed UniMAP in 2007.

The first intake consisted of 116 engineering students who started classes in June 2002. Currently, the university has 11,000 students and it offers engineering and business programmes at various levels from bachelor's to postgraduate.

UniMAP was granted autonomous status on Oct 4 this year after it passed an audit of its readiness.

"Now that we have achieved autonomy, the next stage is to work on governance enhancement. The roles and re-

The journey ahead

sponsibilities of the board and university management are clearly delineated in the Ministry's Guide to Assessing Governance Enhancement. Both enjoy a complementary relationship built through healthy engagement based on trust and respect.

"The role of the board does not involve operational details of running the university. We find this model most useful and efficient. The board recently endorsed the university's strategic plan, UniMAP 2025, which comprises the overall direction of the university, leaving the effectual approaches to the wisdom of UniMAP's administration.

"We look forward to growth as we put the plan into action," said Zul Azhar, adding that the journey towards autonomy was enlightening to the university.

As a higher learning institution whose business is the production of talent, it is required to be on its toes, ready to move and change as and when necessary to produce the best.

"If we excel in producing

excellent students, it is all well and good. But if we do a bad job, then the results could be damaging, not only for the student but also the nation's economy due to low productivity of its human capital.

"With autonomy, we can breathe a little easier. While we understand that autonomy does not give us absolute power and we are still subject to act within the parameters of the regulatory framework, there are areas where we will be able to act faster and more effectively in response to the dynamic environment, thus ensuring that we sustain our competitiveness.

"The biggest advantage is the university is able to differentiate itself from others. Worldwide, many institutions are redefining themselves against the backdrop of the global environment and original purpose of their existence."

Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Strategic and Corporate Communications Center spokesperson said with the



Zul Azhar Zahid Jamal (left) receiving the Autonomous Status certificate from Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik (second from left). With them are UniMAP chairman of the board of directors Brigadier General Datuk Professor Emeritus Dr Kamarudin Hussin (second from right) and UMS chairman of the board of directors Datuk Dr Mohd Sofi Osman (right).

autonomous status, the role of the board as decision-makers will continue to be strengthened in line with their responsibilities to ensure there is accountability in the use of

university resources.

"With autonomy, stakeholders at UMS are entrusted to work together to achieve excellence and propel it onto the world stage."