

VC COLUMN

Leadership and governance

THE Higher Education Institution Leadership and Governance Conference that was held on Dec 18 and Dec 19 last year was an excellent event, co-organised by the Education Ministry, Higher Education Leadership Academy (AKEPT) and University of Malaya.

The conference focused on the leadership and governance challenges that are being faced by the higher education sector in Malaysia and across the world.

One of the highlights of the conference was the talk given by Higher Education Department director-general Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir, who spoke openly about the challenges and opportunities ahead of Malaysia.

Following the talk, and in conversation with others at the conference, it was apparent that the ministry's plans and vision resonate with those in the sector. I believe I can speak for everybody when I say that we wish Dr Siti Hamisah, the wider ministry and other stakeholders our best wishes and full support in further transforming the higher education landscape in Malaysia.

It is not good enough to stand still. We must keep changing and adapting to keep up with the rest of the world. This is best summed up by the so-called Red Queen effect – which is derived from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* – that you have to run just to stand still.

At the conference, I was delighted to share a platform with Putra Business School president and chief executive officer Prof Dr Zulkornain Yusop on a panel that was chaired by University of Malaya vice-chancellor Datuk Dr Abdul Rahim Hashim.

As panel members, we were invited to present our views of leadership and governance within the higher education sector, which was followed by a question-and-answer session. We were asked to be slightly controversial to promote a vibrant discussion.

I tried to tease out the differences between the public and private sectors with emphasis on the fact that foreign branch campuses (those that have a full campus in Malaysia but degree-awarding powers in another country) are different from other education providers in Malaysia.

I was surprised to find that my views were well received. At least the audience members understood some of the unique challenges that foreign branch campuses face, even if they did not fully empathise as they each face their own set of challenges.

It was surprising to me that both the public and private sectors face many of the same challenges. Dr Siti Hamisah said that the Education Ministry is planning to merge

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the two acts of parliament as private and public institutions are governed under different acts.

It emerged that there are advantages and disadvantages in both acts, and having all higher education institutions governed by a common act will level the playing field.

I think that everybody at the conference felt that the higher education sector is a quickly changing environment, and that the speed of change is only going to increase. Over the past 20 years, Malaysia has established itself as a higher education hub with progressive and far-reaching policies. However, it cannot rest on its laurels.

If anything, it must work even harder as other countries have similar aspirations and technology is enabling previously unimagined market penetration. I would encourage the Education Ministry to work to be even more agile, quickly react to changes that are happening around the world and draw on all its stakeholders to realise their vision.

I hope I speak for all providers in Malaysia when I say that we would welcome the opportunity to work with the ministry in helping it take the next step in realising its ambition to cement Malaysia as an educational hub not only in Asia but also across the world.

■ Prof Graham Kendall is the chief executive officer, provost and pro-vice-chancellor of the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

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(From left) Dr Abdul Rahim, Prof Kendall and Prof Zulkornain.