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PUBLIC universities have shown support in retaining the 90 per cent Bumiputera intake quota in the Education Ministry's matriculation programme.

The ministry will increase student intake into the pre-university programme to 40,000 from the present 25,000. And seats for non-Bumiputeras will increase proportionally to 4,000.



Professor Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi said the move shows that the ministry is always providing the best education opportunities to Malaysian students.

He said the Bumiputera quota is not intended to deny the outstanding achievement of other races, but it is the responsibility of the government in safeguarding the rights and interests of Bumiputeras.

He added that maintaining the status quo of the matriculation programme not only coincided with its main objectives, but also has significant impact on the development of Bumiputera human capital in Sarawak.

"If this matriculation programme is open to all, what will be the fate of Sarawakian children, who are studying in disadvantaged schools?"

"Is it fair for them to compete with other students, who have the best facilities and resources in cities, to enter matriculation?" said Kadim.

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) vice-chancellor Professor Dr Ahmad Bashawir Abdul Ghani said the increase in matriculation intake is in line with its objective.

"The programme is to develop the potential of Bumiputera students in science, technology and professional fields via quality pre-university education.

"It was introduced for Bumiputera students following the racial imbalance in universities, and it was the cabinet under Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad that approved an allocation of 10 per cent for non-Bumiputeras in June 2002 for the 2003 intake.

"As such, the cabinet's decision on April 24 to increase the intake of students was the second concession by the government after 16 years to resolve the problem of eligible non-Bumiputeras who fail to obtain places, in line with the mission and vision of New Malaysia to be more inclusive," he said.

RACIAL EQUITY

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Aini Ideris said the matriculation programme should not be associated with race.

She said the quota issue should not arise because every intake and the ecosystem supporting the matriculation programme and Form Six are inclusive.

"We can conclude that all students, regardless of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, will get an opportunity to further their studies at the tertiary level.

"And at the same time, we must respect the social contract that was agreed by the nation's

Public varsities support matriculation quota

founders since independence," she said.

Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) vice-chancellor Professor Emeritus Dr Mohd Azraai Kassim said the ministry's decision plays an important role in maintaining national harmony by providing fair involvement for all races in science, technology and professional courses.

"We have to accept the fact that we live in a multi-racial and harmonious society. Racial harmony needs to be kept as disorder will cause unrest.

"If this continues, we will only undermine the government's earnest effort to create social justice for the sake of the country.

"Therefore, the government's vision to increase the number of students in the matriculation programme should not be disputed," said Azraai, who urged all parties not to polarise the nation's education system.



Professor Emeritus Dr Mohd Azraai Kassim

OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Musa Ahmad said the matter should not be polemic as the opportunities for non-Bumiputera students to get in the programme has increased.

"In 2018, there were 25,000 places for matriculation programmes, of which 22,500 were for Bumiputera students and 2,500 for non-Bumiputeras.

"However, the ministry accepted 4,068 non-Bumiputera students, or 1,568 students more than the quota set.

"Hence, the new quota system for matriculation intake is balanced, as it provides more opportunities for all eligible students, regardless of race.

"Furthermore, to release equity in education, the ministry has allocated 60 per cent of places for students from the low-income group (B40), and the remainder for pupils from the middle- and high-income groups (M40/T20) in its 2019 intake policy for the matriculation programme," he said.

Musa said there are many opportunities for students to pursue a degree through various preparatory programmes, including Form Six. "They can also apply for foundation courses at public universities, or study A Level.

"The opportunities to pursue an education at polytechnics and community colleges are also open, regardless of race."

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) also showed its support for the ministry's decision.

Faculty of Engineering and Architecture dean Professor Dr Shahrir Abdullah said his faculty relied heavily on the matriculation programme to enrol Bumiputera students.

"The lack of qualified Bumiputera candidates with Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia



Dr Maszlee Malik (second from right) with students who received offer letters for the matriculation programme. Last year, the Education Ministry allocated 1,000 special places for outstanding Chinese students from the B40 group in its matriculation programme. PIC BY AHMAD IRHAM MOHD NOOR

(STPM) makes the matriculation programme a savior to balance the number of Bumiputera students with other races.

"This effort needs to be strengthened so that the government's goal of producing more professional talent, especially among the Bumiputera, can be achieved,"



Professor Datuk Dr Musa Ahmad

UKM Faculty of Technology and Information Technology dean Professor Dr Abdullah Mohd Zin said the university has been enrolling students from matriculation, STPM and diploma courses.

"In terms of candidate quality, we find that there is no significant difference between the three categories.

"The matriculation programme, since its introduction in the late 1970s, has given many opportunities, especially to rural

students who are in short supply, to compete in science and technology," he said.

"The entry quota in the matriculation programme assures the public that the government is concerned with the welfare of students in the B40 group, who have no choice but to pursue their studies at public universities, which offer cheaper tuition fees compared with private or foreign universities," he added.

The UKM's Centre for Academic Management, which is directly involved in student affairs, says the matriculation programme supplies nearly 60 to 70 per cent of Bumiputera students in the university's science and technology courses.

The centre also stated that 70 per cent of students in critical courses, such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and law, are students from the matriculation programme.



Professor Dr Wahid Razzaly

LIFELONG LEARNING

Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) vice-chancellor Professor Dr Wahid Razzaly said the university intends to maintain the quotas in its matriculation programmes to

ensure that bumiputera students get an opportunity to pursue a higher education.

"UTHM will always help the nation achieve its national agenda, which is to correct economic imbalance through education, especially in science, technology and professional fields.

"We fully support the ministry's stance to maintain the Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera student quota. Therefore, all parties need to talk and seek mutual consent to identify other alternative routes that can attract students to pursue lifelong learning to avoid dropping out."

Wahid said this issue does not need to be blown out of proportion as there are alternatives.

UTHM has recently been appointed by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) as a "Prior Experience-Based Learning Credential Assessment Centre", also known as the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) centre, which screens individual qualifications to pursue a degree at public universities.

"These routes provide opportunities to working adults, who do not need to undergo matriculation or STPM to pursue a higher education."

Matriculation is a one- to two-year pre-university programme that has been managed by the Education Ministry since 1999. Prior to this, the programme was offered by the respective local universities.

Its ethnic quota was implemented in 2005 to correct the imbalance between Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera students in critical courses, such as medicine, accounting, pharmacy and law.

On April 24, the intake increase was proposed at a cabinet meeting to ensure that the best performing students have a chance to further their studies. Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik also said the government saw a need to boost the number of students in science.

However, he drew public ire after he justified it on the basis that job opportunities in the private sector were low for Bumiputera graduates because of language barrier.

He told a forum at Universiti Sains Malaysia recently that those calling for the matriculation programme to be opened to other races should also address the unfair job market dominated by a particular race.