

University status for state campuses

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SHAH ALAM: Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) is moving ahead with a proposal to upgrade all main state campuses to full-fledged universities.

Malaysia's largest university will also grant autonomy to every branch campus under the ambitious project to enhance their management and improve the delivery of education.

Vice Chancellor Datuk Professor Dr Sahol Hamid Abu Bakar said UiTM would apply for full university status for its state campuses once the proposal is accepted by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Cabinet.

"The state campuses will make the transition one at a time, following which they will be renamed UiTM Perlis or UiTM Sarawak for example," he told NST-UiTM Varsity Voice in an interview.

Currently, UiTM is a single university with campuses in every state, with some states hosting more than one branch.

It is understood that the first branches slated for this exercise will be the larger campuses such as Arau in Perlis, Seri Iskandar in Perak, Dungun in Terengganu and Kota Samarahan based in Sarawak.

These four branches have been selected to hold their own convocations as the first step towards becoming universities.

When this happens, UiTM will become a group of affiliated universities governed by a system-wide body modeled after the University of Wales.

“Under this system, there will be a single Senate and Board of Directors with autonomy given to the respective financial, administrative and management departments of the branch campuses,” said Sahol.

Meanwhile, the position of campus directors will be changed to rectors while any new campuses will become a branch of the state university.

To complement the transition, he said UiTM would introduce new faculties and as many as 300 new programmes and courses.

Elaborating on the reasons behind the proposal, Sahol said: The university is huge with a total of more than 170,000 students and some 19,000 lecturers.”

“To manage it properly and smoothly, we need to give autonomy to the branch campuses so they can be more efficient and effective as an institution of higher learning.”

UiTM has already put in place a succession plan to train potential managers for the new universities.

The original idea for this proposal came from the Vice Chancellor while he was still in MoHE. The idea solidified after a discussion with the Minister.

“It now forms part of my vision to transform UiTM into one of the world’s top universities within 20 years,” added Sahol.

(Ed's Note: This article first appeared in Varsity Voice, a monthly publication jointly produced by the New Straits Times and Universiti Teknoogi MARA (UiTM) under the newspaper's Journalism on Campus project.)

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