The chairmen of the board of directors of two research universities have switched places as of this month.

Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Mohamad Zawawi Ismail has been appointed as the new board of directors chairman for Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). He takes over from Tan Sri Dr Zulkifli A Hassan who has now moved to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

Prof Emeritus Zawawi whose appointment is until March 31, 2015 is not new to UKM as he had served as dean of the Faculty of Engineering in 1989 and deputy vice-chancellor (Development) in 1991. He obtained his undergraduate and doctorate degrees in Electronics Engineering from Leeds University in the United Kingdom in 1969 and 1972 respectively.

He was one of the founding members of the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronics Systems Berhad (MIMOS) and served as its deputy director-general.

UKM vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin gave a briefing on the university and the roles of the four deputy vice-chancellors to the new chairman at the chancellery on Monday.

Prof Emeritus Zawawi said his presence in UKM is not to micro manage but to contribute his experience gathered from working in both the public and private sectors.

He said that there should be no communication gap between a leader and the workforce in an organisation.

"A high performing organisation needs to start with a clear vision which must then be communicated to inspire the workforce," he said.

Prof Sharifah Hapsah said that a university was no longer just a warehouse of knowledge but an integral part of the economic development of a nation.

"Universities have to work with the government, private sector and venture capitalists to achieve the nation’s goals," she said.

"One of UKM’s challenges is to produce graduates who are innovative with entrepreneurial skills, and who can create jobs instead of merely seeking employment," she added.

Meanwhile, UKM has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry to set up a Chair in Women’s Leadership. The Chair is to raise the intellectual development of women and their potential to be leaders of society into the future.

The Ministry has allocated RM4mil to be disbursed at RM500,000 a year for the next eight years for the Chair which will be at the Centre for Women’s Leadership at the university.

The MoU was signed by the ministry’s secretary-general Datuk Dr Noorul Ainur Mohd Nur and Prof Sharifah Hapsah.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil who witnessed the signing on March 30, said the Chair will provide motivation to women in the country who have the potential to be leaders.

"The setting up of the chair is a good investment as it is the government’s aspirations to increase the number of women who have the potential and leadership capabilities to be leaders," she said.

Prof Sharifah Hapsah said UKM will use the funds allocated to ensure that the person appointed to the Chair would be an individual who could further enhance women’s leadership in the country.

"The university will work with the holder of the Chair to develop a set of comprehensive academic activities, research, publications and the sharing of knowledge in women’s leadership," she said. — UKM news portal
Shahrizat (second from right) witnesses the exchange of documents between Prof Sharifah Hapsah and Dr Noorul Ainur.

Prof Emeritus Zawawi greeting UKM academic staff at the briefing.