WHILE officially here today to visit Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP), Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) president Sir William Wakeham and chief executive David Brown hope for more lofty achievements during their two days here.

“Malaysia is home to the second largest number of IChemE members, almost 4,000, so I try and get here reasonably often,” said Brown, IChemE is the international organisation for chemical, biochemical and process engineering professionals.

“We are proud of UM, whose chemical engineering programme we’ve recently accredited at the top level, marking it out as first rate against global standards. UTP is another excellent institution and the supplier of large numbers of well trained engineers to Malaysia’s economy.

“We’ll also be meeting with colleagues from Petronas and other industry professionals, discussing how we can help ensure the ‘talent pipeline’ for industry is flowing effectively.”

Wakeham said: “I am interested in the partnerships among universities, industry and the IChemE to the overall benefit of chemical engineering as a profession globally and in Malaysia in particular.

Chemical engineers and chemical engineering can and do contribute to several of the key economic objectives of Malaysia. So, as a champion of the discipline, I am anxious to make sure we advance the discipline here.”

Coming from a materials science background, Brown is excited by the challenge of biodegradable polymers and biomedical materials for better use of natural resources. “Malaysia has a huge opportunity to do the latter, based especially on the palm oil sector.”

He feels there is much value in engineering and science, using them to enhance economic well being by attracting investment and creating jobs, and to improve health and quality of life.

Wakeham, who trained as a molecular physicist and then moved into chemical engineering later, said: “I discovered that it offered a much more rapid way to have an effect upon the lives of a great number of people in the world.

“The public appreciation of science and engineering is something that I now pay particular attention to and if our visit to Malaysia can help with that, I am delighted.

“One of my current activities is the search for nominations for the Queen Elizabeth Prize for engineering which is intended to promote exactly what engineering has done for the world that is exciting and worthwhile through an international prize comparable with the Nobel Prizes for Science in prestige and value.”

Even away from work, Brown said: “I like to cook. think of it as edible chemistry!”

As for Wakeham, he has come to recognise in retirement from full-time work that he can’t pursue earlier sporting activities in football and water skiing with the intensity he once did. “But, I regularly relax on my powerboat and in remodelling my houses in UK and Portugal.”