

The rise and rise of UKM



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EDUCATION

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Being the first varsity to use Bahasa Malaysia as its medium of instruction, UKM has grown from strength to strength making it among the nation's best.

The nation's third oldest varsity with its focus on academic excellence and research, has every reason to celebrate its achievements over the last 44 years.



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of instruction.

The effort to implement it slowly gained traction over the next two decades but collapsed when the colonialists mounted many obstacles and resistance to stop it in its tracks.

However, after independence was declared, a resurgence in nationalism resurrected the concept of a national university, and in 1968, a steering committee to bring such an institution to life was formed.

It was finally in May 18, 1970 that UKM first opened its doors in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur to 190 undergraduates and one postgraduate student.

UKM now calls Bangi its main home with two branch campuses – one in the heart of Kuala Lumpur and another in Cheras.



Aiming high: Prof Noor Azlan says that UKM wants to spend more time focusing on research.

The current vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Noor Azlan Ghazali believes UKM is the only university in the country that was built with the aspirations of the nation behind it.



“We always say that whatever problems of the nation are our problems, whatever aspirations of the nation, are our aspirations, and whatever success of the nation, is our success,” he adds.

The anniversary celebrations will be a reflection of what has become of the varsity over the years.

“We are looking back at our contributions, successes and roles played so far, while at the same time thinking of how we can move forward,” says Prof Noor Azlan who as vice-chancellor, is incidentally celebrating UKM’s anniversary for the first time.

As part of the 44th anniversary opening ceremony, there was a launch of 44 UKM publications. There were also 44 students and staff who cycled 44km from Putrajaya to the main campus in Bangi, among other activities.



Work in progress: An aerial view of UKM’s main campus in Bangi when it was under construction then.

Guardians of the nation

Now in its current home in Bangi that spans over 1,000ha, Prof Noor Azlan says UKM calls itself the “guardians of the nation.”

He says the phrase means that the research university yearns to be at the forefront in advancing the nation and protecting its visions.

Whether it is about forming a more united society for the sake of stability or distributing development



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“Every member of the UKM family must ensure they make themselves responsible and be at the forefront to tackle everything that happens in this nation together,” he shares.

“We look to being a respectable national university to carry out these duties but at the same time, be globally reputable,” he says.

Prof Noor Azlan strongly believes that a university’s excellence should be judged from the perspective of all stakeholders.



Cycling fun: Prof Noor Azlan (fourth from left) and next to him UKM board of directors chairman Emeritus Prof Datuk Dr Mohamad Zawawi Ismail, with the students and staff who cycled the 44km stretch from Putrajaya to the main campus in Bangi.

“If you look from the perspective of the scholarly communities, we hope that they will recognise UKM’s academic excellence.

“But if you look at it from the perspective of the industry – CEOs, business managers and leaders – they will probably see things differently.

“Their measures of excellence may be different from how scholars measure excellence in the universities,” he says.

He adds that if one considers the views of parents and prospective students, they would want to know what value can be added on to the student.

“When we mention that UKM is the university that people talk about, it is about the excellence at fulfilling all these different parameters of success.

“I think that is very critical and a challenge that UKM has to address,” he says.



In harmony: Members of the UKM family singing the university's song Varsiti Kita at its opening ceremony.

UKM is equally good at sports, says Prof Noor Azlan.

“Sometimes when we are talking about academics, we do not realise that we are equally strong in sports.

“We strive for excellence and have identified a few sporting activities that can bring us to the global level,” he says.

He explains that UKM has identified cricket and volleyball as part of its sports excellence programmes for students.

Much emphasis has also been placed on football, golf and cycling, he adds.

He also says that the varsity has plans to implement an idea called *Citra UKM* to create well-rounded individuals.

“It talks less about the student’s field of study and more about the person, their role and also that of the

He explains that there are three major compartments to *Citra UKM* – graduate competency, being multidisciplinary and having innovation and entrepreneurial skills.

Graduate competency includes communication skills, ability to interact and lead, working in teams, having ethics and ICT skills, among others.

“Being multidisciplinary does not mean one will be an expert in many fields. It simply means one who can appreciate, understand and accommodate different disciplines.

“For example, we want our Islamic studies students to be aware of issues that are confronting the field of biotechnology,” Prof Noor Azlan explains.

Possessing innovation and entrepreneurial capabilities would mean a student is creative and business-savvy.

“These are the three components that will be part of the curriculum expected to be introduced in the next semester,” he adds.

Making an impact

UKM was declared a research university in 2006, and Prof Noor Azlan says the varsity aims to spend more time understanding and focusing on research not just to create an impact but to get international recognition.

“The utmost goal is wanting to see an impact. What is our research telling? Does it solve any problems? Does it bring new insights into existing problems?”

“Are we advocating a new direction for certain issues such as tackling poverty or liberalising the Malaysian economy?”

“We want to go one step further,” he reiterates.

“We are organising our research activities and already have our niche areas. However, we want to focus more on problems, where we pool our work together. It will allow us to make an impact in some of the areas,” adds Prof Noor Azlan.

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