

Let science reign but keep choices wide and standards high: Experts

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By Philip Golingai

SABAHANS react with glee over the setting up of the Sabah university. But there is reservation over whether Sabahans can fill the intake.

How large will the university be is still not known. But it must be big enough to be worth while. Students intake will run into thousands.

There is a bias for science courses especially when Malaysia is in the thick of industrialisation where engineers, technicians, technologists, scientists and whatever they are called, are needed fullfil Malaysia's vision of a developed nation by 2020.

King Sultan Azlan Shah has spelled out science as the emphasis for Malaysian education when he opened his last parliament recently. Sultan Azlan retires next month under Malaysia's unique monarchy system in which nine hereditary rulers take

turns to become king every five years.

Sabahans generally felt that the worry of sufficient intake is unfounded.

"The Sabah university should not be exclusive to Sabahans," Albert Chia, President of the United Overseas Sabah Returnees Association, told *Sabah Times*.

"It should accept students from all over the country to emphasize national integration."

Chia, an educationist of more than 20 years, is principal of Sekolah Menengah Kuhara in Tawau. Therefore, he is a strong advocate for the setting up for Sabah university in Tawau.

Doubts that Sabahans can meet the minimum university requirements were also raised and there was a suggestion by the

dean of UKMS to lower the entry qualification to allow form five students to enter Sabah university.

Chia and other educationists disagreed with this suggestion.

"There is no need to lower the entry requirement," Chia said.

"We can maintain the minimum, but also allow form five students with good Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) results to do matriculation courses as a pre-entry requirement to the university."

Educationists said matriculations were popular in western universities, particularly Australian, largely because it cut studying time.

"It takes two years to complete Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM)," said Casey Leong, who runs a private

college in Kota Kinabalu. "A levels studies and matriculation programmes only take one year."

This explains why many Sabahan students, especially the non-bumiputras, find STPM, the minimum entry requirement to local varsities, unattractive.

Further, even Yayasan Sabah, which offers scholarship for tertiary education, find it more attractive to send students to the United States at the risk of these students coming home with degrees and qualifications which are not recognised by the government.

Also local varsities are limited in the choice of courses.

"There is no point for my daughter to study STPM because our local varsities did not have the course she

wanted to study," said a doctor.

Her daughter has just graduated with a degree in electrical engineering with a major in telecommunication and electronics and she is now working for a large telecommunication company in Kuala Lumpur because there are no jobs available for her in Sabah.

This engineering course is not even offered by the University Technology Malaysia.

"As for my son, he wanted to study dentistry or medicine in a local university but the entry requirement for non-bumiputras is high," said the parent.

Spencer Soo, executive director of Kinabalu Commercial College, there was a tendency for Sabah students with good academic results and the money to pursue overseas studies after finishing form

five.

He said this was because overseas universities were promoting their courses aggressively with many choices to make entry to their faculties attractive.

"STPM will have to compete with private colleges and institutions offering vocational or technical training to attract students if science is to be emphasized in our education policy," Soo said.

"This offers students an opportunity to seek jobs as technicians after completing their college courses should they decide

not to enter university for whatever reasons."

Leong said matriculation courses offered by the Sabah university would help to keep local students in the state and cut education costs for parents.

He said non-bumiputra students should be made more aware of the opportunities offer by local varsities.

"Non-bumiputra students have the misconception that it is difficult for them to enter local universities," Leong said.