

Refocusing Research Education in Malaysia

SWINBURNE

SWINBURNE
UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY
SARAWAK CAMPUS



Dr. Ismail Ait Saadi, Prof. D.P. Dash & Dr. Heidi Collins

Swinburne University of
Technology, Sarawak Campus



Background: Doctoral Education in Malaysia

Master by research and doctoral student numbers have multiplied over past 10 years
 Masters tripled, PhDs multiplied five-fold:

PhDs awarded	Malaysian	International Students	Total
2006	427	234	661
2016	2163	2152	4315
Growth rate	410%	820%	550%

To support its aim of becoming a high-income nation by 2023, the government has set a target: From 23,000 Malaysian PhD holders in 2014, to 60,000 by 2023

Looking to 20 public and 43 private Malaysian universities, and branch campuses of 9 foreign universities: Swinburne, Monash, Curtin, Nottingham, Heriot-Watt, Newcastle, Southampton, Reading & Xiamen



But how should this be achieved?

MyBrain15: Scholarships for Malaysians worth GBP 500 million are being awarded. But questions remain:

- Why this number?
- What skills and attributes are required?
- Employability?
- Supervisory capacity?
- Quality?
- Who should lead this endeavor?



Borneo Research Education Conference (BREC) 2013-2017

From our observation that that Malaysian Government is largely focused on research outcomes, there was a need for universities to start talking about researcher development:

Personal & Professional Development, Process & Outcomes

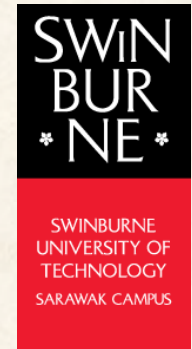
Aim: To enhance research education in the region

Vision:

- Doctoral education & beyond
- Borneo & beyond
- Conference & beyond
- Business field & beyond



Principles of BREC



Collaborative

Five Borneo universities collaborated to establish BREC: Swinburne, Unimas, UiTM, UMS & Curtin



Developmental

BREC 2013: [Developing as a Researcher Through the Culture of Sharing](#)

BREC 2014: [Developing as a Researcher by Doing Meaningful Research](#)

BREC 2015: [Developing as a Researcher by Playing Scholarly Roles](#)

BREC 2016: [Developing as a Researcher by Building Research Skills](#)

BREC 2017: [Developing as a Researcher Through Perseverance](#)

Conference Design

- Warm-up workshop
 - Creating awareness and reducing barriers
- Inclusiveness
 - Encouraging students at all stages of development
- Students first
 - Increasing student empowerment
- Authentic engagement
 - Exposing to various academic roles, high quality interactions
- Safe environment
 - Overcoming inhibitions, learning to give & receive feedback
- Constructive Feedback
 - Instilling academic rigour, with respect & dignity



Impact

Positive participant experiences

It was a very supportive (non-threatening) environment for a novice presenter.

It reduced the gap between research students and supervisors.

Great care taken in providing feedback.

It was possible to build closer relationships, which could develop as support systems.

I learnt by watching others talk about their research. Now I have a better idea about research proposals.

The conference has taken me to another level of my entire research.

But little ongoing dialogue between institutions...



Challenges

1. Unfamiliarity with the the term and the field

What is research education?

2. KPI driven institutions, staff & students

Can I get a publication from this?

3. Hierarchical culture – national & institutional

I will have to talk to my boss

4. Leadership instability

That's not my role now

5. Lack of role clarity

What does it mean to collaborate?



Conclusions – Our Way Forward



1. Create awareness of research education as an emerging field
 - *Connect with local & international community*
2. Reduce individual barriers
 - *Encourage active participation & meeting KPIs*
3. Neutralise the institutional barriers
 - *Attach BREC to an external association*
4. An Overhaul?
 - *An event or a vision?*
 - *Coordination, cooperation, or collaboration?*

References

- Azman, N., Sirat, M., & Pang, V. (2016). Managing and mobilising talent in Malaysia: issues, challenges and policy implications for Malaysian universities. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 38(3), 316–332. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2016.1174406>
- Cheong, K. C., Hill, C., Fernandez-Chung, R., & Leong, Y. C. (2016). Employing the “unemployable”: Employer perceptions of Malaysian graduates. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(12), 2253–2270. DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2015.1034260
- Evans, L. (2012). International Journal for Researcher Development The scholarship of researcher development: mapping the terrain and pushing back boundaries. *International Journal for Researcher Development*, 2(2), 75–98. <http://doi.org/10.1108/17597511111212691>
- Fong, L. L., Sidhu, G. K., & Fook, C. Y. (2014). Exploring 21st Century Skills among Postgraduates in Malaysia. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1406>
- Hill, C., Cheong, K-C., Leong, Y-C., & Fernandez-Chung, R. (2014). TNE – Trans-national education or tensions between national and external? A case study of Malaysia, *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:6, 952-966, DOI:10.1080/03075079.2012.754862
- Ming, Y.C., Kai, W.H., Hoi, P.T., & Kuk, F.F. (2013). Patterns of co-authorship and research collaboration in Malaysia, *Aslib Proceedings: New Information Perspectives*, Vol. 65 Issue: 6, pp.659-674. DOI: [10.1108/AP-12-2012-0094](https://doi.org/10.1108/AP-12-2012-0094)
- Ministry of Education, Malaysia (2017) *Graduate Tracer Study*, <http://graduan.mohe.gov.my>.
- Poole, B. (2014). The rather elusive concept of “doctorateness”: a reaction to Wellington. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(9), 1–16. DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2013.873026](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.873026)