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Mara is focusing on making MRSM the top choice for students who obtain excellent results in Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) and Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3).

LOOKING AT THE FUTURE

To transform Mara into a centre of excellence for education, the council first looked into what laid ahead of it, said Hasnita.

"We have to understand how the world is today in order to ready ourselves for what's coming next. Students need to be fully prepared to compete globally amidst the uncertainty."

Hasnita pointed out that the future is basically characterised by new developments, innovations, technology and the fundamentals of STEM.

"Students must be equipped with relevant skills to secure the jobs of the future — jobs that we never heard of. These skills include data analytics, robotics and artificial intelligence.

"Some traditional jobs will be made obsolete by advanced technologies and machines.

"So, we did scenario planning and brainstormed with educators of Mara from MRSM, TVET and higher education institutions. Then, we finally identified nine job sectors that Mara should focus on."

The nine sectors are Engineering and Environment, Marketing, Business and Management, IT and Computer Design, IT and Computer Science, Build Professionals, Accounting and Finance, Medical Science, Food Security and Transport Engineering.

"These nine sectors will drive all our educational initiatives. The identified areas will help Mara shape its curriculum and safeguard its competitiveness."

MRSM AS FIRST CHOICE

According to Hasnita, focusing on the nine sectors will start concurrently at all levels of Mara's education system.

Mara needs to first focus on making MRSM the top choice for students who excelled in Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah and Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3.

"Unfortunately, the performance of MRSMs is not much better than the residential schools. We are not doing well in Science and Mathematics, yet we are called a science college.

"Students are bogged down with so many things. With a heavy curriculum and other activities taking place, they are getting only five to six hours of sleep."

Changes are in the pipeline to beef up perfor-

mance and prepare students to be relevant for the future.

"We are reviewing the subjects taught in the MRSM while adding new modules. We need to focus on STEM subjects, so we are putting in extra hours for Science and Mathematics.

"On top of that, new modules such as design and coding are introduced as early exposure to face the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as students who enrol in MRSM must have strong inclination for Science and Mathematics," she added.

Teacher training will be stressed to improve MRSM's performance.

"To ensure MRSM is producing high performing students, Mara has provided continuous training for teachers. Training needs to be strengthened and teachers have to be outcome-driven which in turn will help improve students' achievements."

Hasnita highlighted the importance of English as the main medium of communication.

"Teachers should be upskilled to communicate in English outside the classroom and students are encouraged to master the language.

"The ability to speak good English opens up students' opportunity to advance in the professional world. This is not that the Malay language is not important, but if you want to be globally competitive, English is the way to go.

"MRSM students are given the opportunity to learn a third language such as German, Mandarin and Japanese as an elective subject. These languages were selected as Mara has identified for students to pursue tertiary education in Germany or Japan."

Mara is also looking at digital technology and learning to aid teaching. However in order to do this, the infrastructure needs to be upgraded.

"We are actively raising funds to provide students with essential facilities. When it comes to funding, the organisation must think of innovative ways such as private-public partnerships.

"For example, there are over 200,000 members under the MRSM alumni association (Ansara) who can help to raise funds to support the schools.

"We are also approaching corporate organisations which want to sponsor bright students who later may be their future employees. These are some of the means that we should be looking at instead of relying on the government

for more funds."

STAYING IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Despite having a proper route from secondary to tertiary education, Mara has neither tracked nor encouraged students to stay within the ecosystem.

"Although RM500 million is spent on MRSM every year, only 17 per cent out of 8,000 MRSM students who completed Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia and International IGCSE get into the Mara ecosystem for tertiary education.

"We want to guide MRSM students and show them the different pathways in the ecosystem after SPM and IGCSE."

In approaching the issue, communication is vital, said Hasnita.

"We have to go to every MRSM and talk to the students about the potential pathways that we offer. We are not forcing them to follow the pathways but we want to provide them with choices and alternatives.

"They are among the top students in the country, why not invest further in them? It is Mara's hope to capture at least 40 per cent in the ecosystem instead of just 17 per cent.

"We want to sponsor students with excellent results. For those who do not meet the grade, Mara will assist them to get into other pathways."

The Mara ecosystem for tertiary institutions is divided into two — higher education and TVET.

Hasnita explained that higher education institutions like KUPTM and Kolej Profesional Mara offer professional courses like accounting and business.

"For TVET, there are Kolej Kemahiran Tinggi Mara, Giatmara and Institut Kemahiran Mara, among others. Meanwhile, Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL) is considered a higher TVET institution."

Mara has also reviewed the courses offered by these institutions and found 30 overlapping courses.

"UniKL programmes, for example, have to be revamped to see how they can be streamlined based on the nine areas identified."

UniKL Business School has recently set up the Philip Kotler Centre of Marketing Excellence.

"Kotler is known as the father of modern marketing. We are also going to support the publication of his new marketing textbook; UniKL Business School will contribute case studies from Malaysia.

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DR HASNITA HASHIM