

Education in Ireland **beyond** medicine

> Irish HEIs to recruit best students and researchers from around the world

MALAYSIANS have commonly looked to Ireland for education in Medicine and Dentistry. Many have returned to practise in both the public and private health sectors in various disciplines such as general practice, cardiology and emergency care.

In recent years, there is a growing trend of Malaysian students admitting not just into the universities but also the Institutes of Technology in non-medical fields. This stems from a new awareness that Ireland has much to offer beyond Medicine.

Asked recently about the strengths of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Irish ambassador to Malaysia Declan Kelly said besides the healthcare disciplines, they also offer excellent programmes in engineering, ICT, life sciences, business studies, arts, agri-business and veterinary sciences at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

He added that international students in Ireland come from all over the world. Initially, they were mainly from Europe, the US, Australia and New Zealand—countries with whom there are historical ties. Now, apart from Malaysians, there is a strong group from China and growing numbers from India, the Middle East and Africa.

Graduates from Ireland are much sought after because they are well-prepared for the workplace. For this reason, many of the world's leading multinational companies (MNCs) have offices there. Google, LinkedIn, Facebook, Intel, Hewlett Packard and Microsoft are among the MNCs who have their European headquarters in Ireland.

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Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Analog, Boston Scientific and Cisco are among the companies that have derived synergy from collaborating with the research centres of the HEIs.

"Ireland's education system will continue to innovate and adapt to meet the ever changing needs of students and employers in all disciplines. Our third level system will continue to work closely with government and industry to make sure we are producing graduates with the skills needed to run a dynamic modern economy," Kelly said.

Irish HEIs are not only keen to recruit the best students and researchers from around the world, but also to work with other academic institutions in areas of mutual interests. Where possible, this could extend to exporting Irish education to other shores.

Successful programmes (such as the one at the Penang Medical College) have

encouraged the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland to set up a new campus in Cyberjaya. Several of the Institutes of Technology have established arrangements with Malaysian third level institutions for students to pursue top-up degree programmes in Ireland.

Institutional links have also been made for the upgrading of academic personnel through short courses, full-time postgraduate programmes and research at the Irish institutions.

The Irish HEIs have committed significant resources to raise the profile of Irish education abroad. The Education in Ireland unit managed by Enterprise Ireland has a specific role for this purpose. Additionally, representatives of several institutions have made multiple visits to Malaysia to connect with their counterparts. In recent years, there has also been a strong Irish presence at education fairs in the region.

HELP University offers Derby Online Learning

BY CHOW EE-TAN

FOR more than a decade now, University of Derby, UK, has been delivering quality online learning programmes. More than 3,000 students across 100 countries have so far benefitted from the courses.

In September last year, HELP University launched the Derby Online Learning programme and became its exclusive partner and distributor in 10 countries in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, providing accessible education and promoting Malaysia as a regional hub of education.

This is also a step towards widening educational opportunities for those seeking undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in a flexible and self-paced environment.

"In collaborating with Derby, HELP provides its expertise in transnational education. We hope to be a global model that can meet the cultural needs and expectations in online learning," says HELP University vice president (Corporate & Operational Performances) and director of Online Learning, Datin Dr Wendy Liow.

She says first and foremost, Derby Online Learning supports the continual education of working professionals.

"Online learning is ideal for the ambitious but busy working professionals, who are unable to access education through traditional means. It gives them flexibility and convenience.

"Students can download information provided by the university and have online tutorials and access information using the latest technology. Also, students can sign up module by module and can take longer time to complete their courses," says Liow.

She says online learning targets two groups of people. "Firstly, it is for those who

want a progression in their career. For instance we have a "top up" MBA programme where students choose a few more subjects based on their prior qualifications. Secondly it is for people who want a change of career. Certain professions like pilots have to retire at 45 and they can pursue new career paths through online learning."

Derby Online Learning programme offers Certificate to Master level qualifications, covering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees such as Bachelor of Science (Psychology) British Psychology Society accredited, Masters of Arts in Education, Bachelor of Science in IT, Masters of Art in Hospitality Management, MA Environmental Management, Commercial Law, MBA top up from ACCA and CIMA, and Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Finance (Top Up).

Liow says HELP has been getting a lot of enquiries for its 27 courses. Their programmes and learning processes reflect the current pedagogical principles for online learning, which are focused on specific needs for the online learner.

Explaining how the lessons are delivered, she says as opposed to the traditional distance learning programme, students at Derby Online Learning Programme have access to a virtual classroom and a wide range of learning resources and also experienced UK facilitators and lecturers.

"Our students are part of an online student community and those who register on certain key target market programmes of the partnership, will be able to enjoy some live and face-to-face activity. All students will have an allocated online tutor who will support and navigate them

through their learning. Online student communities, such as discussion forums, will also provide engagement with peers in the learning process.

"Students will undertake studies through a virtual learning environment (VLE) called Blackboard Collaborate, where course content and resources are available. They will have full access to the university's range of online services," she says.

Learning hours are 200 per standard module (15/20 credits). Usually students can expect to spend up to 20 hours per week on their studies and this will be a combination of being online, having discussions with tutors and fellow students, reading, undertaking online module activities, and undertaking critical thinking and reflection.

"The lessons are interactive, collaborative and engaging. There is a high level of connectivity in our online network. There is also a close focused learning with instructors in small class (virtual), hence more intense collaborative learning," says Liow.

"Students are taught and supported by the University of Derby online tutors and HELP lecturers will be trained by Derby's team of

experts in online programme delivery. There are more than 200 online tutors and many of them are very experienced retired tutors from reputable universities."

Depending on the programme choice, students can benefit from the face-to-face engagement of the HELP lecturers through the study centres in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Liow stresses that the standard of a Derby Online Learning qualification is equal to that of a university-based qualification; only the delivery mode differs.

"The standards are the same, the award title is the same and the same rigorous quality assurance processes have been gone through. The certificate will confirm the award as

being an award of the University of Derby without distinguishing that it was studied online," she says.

She adds that research has shown a double-digit growth in online learning worldwide.

"Online distance learning enhances lifelong learning. It gives access to so many more people, including those who are not mobile like the disabled. Derby Online Learning programmes help to culturalise and change the education landscape, and are a catalyst to bring on a new culture of teaching and learning."



Online learning enhances lifelong learning and gives access to so many more people, says Liow.