

UK-Malaysia Higher Education Roundtable

Reinvigorating partnerships,
building ambition

Kuala Lumpur,
28 February 2024

UK MUC
UK Malaysia University Consortium



Context

Tertiary education has always been one of the most important pillars in the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, with shared aspirations to grow human capital and to continuously improve the quality and relevance of higher education.

Both countries have a strong history of collaborations and have well-established partnerships between universities, research institutions, and government bodies to facilitate student exchange programs, transnational education programmes, joint research projects, and academic collaborations.

In addition, the UK is a popular destination for Malaysian students seeking high-quality

education qualifications. On the other hand, Malaysia has also been working to improve its higher education sector with ambitions to be a leading international education hub in the region.

In recent years, we have however, seen a decline in the number of Malaysian students pursuing UK higher education both overseas and in-country (TNE) for reasons that include the economic downturn and the rise of new opportunities from other study destinations. There has also been a sluggish trend in driving new higher education collaborations between the two countries, with a shift in interest and focus on the more rapidly developing markets in the SEA.



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Building An Enabling Environment

Strengthening higher education cooperation by signing a 5-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Its scope includes strategic cooperation in scientific research, talent training between higher education institutions of the UK and Malaysia, the exchange of academic staff, educators, experts and students on programmes that will benefit both partner countries in areas of common interest and priority.

As part of Going Global, the British Council and the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia together launched the UK-Malaysia University Consortium in January 2022 as a flagship initiative to seed-fund and promote strategic engagement in higher education between its member universities, laying a foundation for long term collaborations, shared priorities and complementary expertise between UK and Malaysian HEIs.

Opportunities

Malaysia is ripe for new partnership opportunities with the UK, especially innovative collaborations that look beyond merely teaching transactions and recruitment, towards driving student and academic mobility, building centres of excellence and growing research capacity and collaborations. Malaysia is well positioned as a regional TNE and education hub, which the UK can leverage to expand its presence in the region.



Reinvigorating UK-Malaysia Education Partnerships

The UK-Malaysia Higher Education Roundtable was designed to bring together leading stakeholders from both countries to explore how to collectively increase partnership links and re-energise ambitions for the UK-Malaysia education relationship to thrive at all levels.

The event examined solutions to market challenges within a volatile higher education environment through sharing perspectives, progress reviews and the identification of strategic actions that drive impact in the higher education sector, aligned with national, regional and global priorities.

The key questions for the roundtable explores what we have done well in the last 30 years and where can we improve, what practical measures can we take, where are the quick wins, what are the areas where we need to invest more to progress our partnerships.

The following is a summary of key themes and recommendations from the roundtable.

Opportunities

Increased impact through multilateral collaborations: The opportunities of increased impact for students and academic exchanges as well as research partnerships working with universities in UK, Malaysia and across the region.

Developing stronger education-industry links: Representatives from both UK and Malaysia recognised the potential for increased collaboration to meet the ambitions of education sectors and governments to increase links with business. These ranged from formal transnational alliances bringing together universities and industry, calls for

two-way internship programmes, the mutual development of enterprise and entrepreneurship education and research co-funding opportunities.

Increased communications and collaborations opportunities based on shared purpose (and not on funding): Enhance communication and collaboration across all levels of our institutions (students, academics, professional service staff, researchers etc) based on shared visions and themes. Partnership opportunities are strategically curated and are signed off at institutional (as opposed to individual) level.





Key Drivers for Success

- **Build on the UK-MY MOU:** This is now a pivotal moment to redefine and create a strategic road map of collaboration in our bilateral relationship. The UK and Malaysia must leverage the recent MOU to create innovative models of partnership across new fields of education collaboration that develop research, talent and skills, build centres of excellence and which promote reciprocal student and faculty mobility between UK and Malaysia.
- **Develop partnerships based on knowledge sharing:** Institutions need to develop innovative partnerships based on shared values and a clear value proposition from both sides from the outset. Resources are always scarce, so partners should understand each other's priorities and have an appropriate level of ambition. Mutuality is critical and there must be opportunities for both sides of the partnership to learn from the other.

Recommended Actions

- **Enhance student and staff mobility:** Malaysia needs a national funding scheme like the Turing Fund and structural incentives for outbound mobility. Such a scheme would enhance reciprocal mobility and drive Malaysia's ambitions for internationalisation. There is a need to create a clear framework for Malaysian institutions to hosting UK students, with flexibility in terms of models and visa processes (short-term study, exchanges, internships etc.). Staff mobility should be more strategic and may be themed around subject areas and increasing impact by focusing on opportunities upon return.
- **Develop collaborative centres of excellence:** These should be centres for research and innovation and should be more innovative in adopting cross-disciplinary approaches, based around global challenges, have global focus and measure impact. Developing a registry of capacity/expertise may be a good starting point to identify areas of strength and kickstart collaborations.
- **Promote innovative TNE:** UK-Malaysia partnerships should adopt a multilateral approach and not be limited to bilateral agreements. There needs to be an interdisciplinary approach to drive innovation – the willingness to work across disciplines is important to reinvigorate UK-Malaysia TNE. TNE partnerships may be expanded to cover broader areas such as mobility, research and industry cooperation. The UK-Malaysia University Consortium with its ambition is to involve more universities and have more in-depth collaboration in relevant areas may be a catalyst to drive these partnerships, especially with cross-fertilisation through wider engagement with other relevant consortiums in East Asia / South-East Asia.
- **Broker networking to build research capacity:** Networking conferences currently focus on mobility, not research. More conferences and networking events where institutions come together to discuss research priorities, share expertise and collaborate for more funding would be valuable to develop research capacity and drive strategic partnerships in this area.