

UM VC: Company exploited our students
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Universiti Malaya blamed a private company for turning a 'soft skills' programme into a direct sales seminar which used the students as guinea pigs earlier this month.

UM Vice-Chancellor Rafiah Salim (right) said the university was unaware that the speakers at the event on March 17 required students to sell their products.

"We are very disappointed with the speakers, who wanted to use the students to help them on exploring their potential market in the university. We will not invite this company anymore for sure," she said when contacted yesterday.

Rafiah said the speakers from Aznita Management Sdn Bhd were expected to share their experience in successful entrepreneurship and not market their insurance product (Amcash).

Graduation requirement

The campus-based direct selling scam was first exposed on March 19.

Final year Arts and Social Science faculty students were required to attend the course and market Amcash as a requisite to graduate.

Some 500 students attended the initial 11-hour briefing by Aznita Management representatives on March 17 and were herded into groups of 10 to sell the product.

A visit by malaysiakini to the UM campus saw promotional booths for the products diligently manned by students.

The students were given two weeks to complete the task and must submit detailed report on their transactions, customer details and techniques used to clinch the deal.

Most controversial of all, the company would grade the reports to determine whether the students pass or fail the course.

Passing system changed

Students however can sigh a breath of relief as Rafiah assured that affected students can now choose any product for their report without having to hold a practical marketing campaign.

She said students can rely on entrepreneurship theories and hypothetical selling techniques and strategies.

"They can even create their own product and write about it, no harm doing so, and we encourage that," she said.

The VC added that in order to pass the soft skills course and graduate, the students would get a pass just as long as they submit their report on time.

Students relieved

On Thursday, an ad hoc student group protesting the direct sales requirement had submitted a petition bearing 209 names of affected students to the vice-chancellor on Thursday.

Contacted yesterday, group spokesperson Chow Yu Hui said they had met Rafiah to express their concerns and were assured that the students would not have to perform the direct sales campaign.

He said Rafiah had also extended the deadline of submission for the report by four days to April 6.

"The faculty office will put up the official notice next week notifying the students about the extension of the deadline," he said.

The UM soft skills programme was initiated by the Higher Education Ministry with the aims of developing entrepreneurship skills among students.

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