

**Clearing the human capital hurdle**  
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One of Malaysia's chief concerns is the depleting level of human capital, with talent either moving abroad or not skilled enough to meet industry standards.

NONEAs such, the government is attempting a major overhaul of the education system with the hope of producing world class talent to sustain the economy through the 10th Malaysia Plan.

Unveiled today, the plan attempts to tackle Malaysia's conundrum through a three-pronged attack involving primary and secondary schooling, higher education and the global talent market.

Changes made to the education system will be made at all levels, starting with a RM150 monthly fee assistance to low income earners to send their four- and five-year-olds to pre-school.

Private involvement in basic education also comes in the form of 'Trust Schools' - Ministry of Education schools that are run autonomously by the private sector.

Standard One at the age of 5+

Privately-run or otherwise, primary schools will be welcoming children aged five into their classrooms as the entry level is lowered by one year from 6+, beginning with the rural schools to allow them a head start.

NONEThere will also be a move to rebrand the teaching profession as a 'profession of choice' by raising teachers' salaries, making them among the highest paid civil servants at entry level.

Additionally, trainee teachers will not be automatically absorbed into service, while teachers who perform can expect a fast-tracked career progression.

Learning from New Zealand and Finland, teachers will receive more practical training, with post-graduate teaching courses extended by six months for this purpose.

Head teachers and principals will have a greater stake in their school's achievement as they will receive financial and other rewards for high performance in the Bai'ah or 'New Deal'.

The rewards will be given for achieving target scores or delivering substantial improvements, while poor performing head teachers and principals will be given remedial training.

Universities to fight for funding

The government will also make tertiary colleges compete for public funding by reducing direct grants and allocating more for scholarships.

Students can choose to take their scholarships or funds to public or private vocational colleges, community colleges or universities of their choice.

As in basic education, the quality of educators is prioritised with a whopping RM2.26 billion allocated to fund PhD scholarships for faculty members.

To meet industry needs, more technical and vocational institutions would be set up and based on the highly-successful German model.

Much will also be done to improve the poor perception of vocational training through campaigns highlighting career prospects and salary structures.

As the new system may take time to produce results, the government will try to pull in foreign talent by relaxing regulations on work visas and property acquisition.

Those seeking a work visa need not be already employed or attached to a company, and those earning more than RM8,000 a month will be granted visas without a time limit.

Expatriate workers are also allowed to purchase property worth RM250,000 or more, compared with RM500,000 at present.

The government also aims to embrace the Malaysian diaspora by keeping a database and providing networking opportunities, as well as encouraging them to invest in the country.

It will also try to put a tight leash on high performing Malaysian students abroad by offering attractive but bonded scholarships to final year students.

Keeping tabs on talent flow and with the sole mandate of attracting quality talent to Malaysian shores will be the Talent Corporation, operating under the Prime Minister's Department.

Meanwhile, employers will find it easier to hire and fire workers as severance pay is likely to drop from the current 75 months for those who have worked for 20 years.

In exchange, the Relief Fund for Loss of Employment will protect workers now more vulnerable to retrenchment with RM600 a month for six months, or as long as unemployed.

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