

Nod for Malaysian Quality Agency

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PUTRAJAYA: The cabinet yesterday approved a bill to replace the National Accreditation Board (LAN) with the Malaysian Quality Agency.

The MQA will have punitive powers in enforcing the quality and standards of courses offered by higher learning institutions.

Only some minor changes need to be made before Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamad tables it for first reading in parliament.

"The cabinet approved it in principle but called for some minor changes. This is being reviewed by my ministry, the Human Resources Ministry and the Attorney-General's Chambers before I can table it in parliament," Mustapa said yesterday.

The MQA will be a merger of LAN and the ministry's Quality Assurance Division.

The new entity will ensure that universities and private colleges adopt the quality and standards outlined under the Malaysia Qualification Framework.

While LAN was focused on accreditation of courses taught at the institutions, it does not have powers of enforcement and could only refer cases to the Higher Education Minister for action.

MQA will have wider powers of enforcement, including taking action against errant institutions.

Mustapa also announced that all public universities had been instructed to process applications by foreign students for postgraduate degrees in one month.

"This is to be a new indicator in the universities' key performance index (KPI)," he said.

The one-month deadline is to be observed as long as an applicant's documents are

complete and in order. It was introduced following complaints that postgraduate students applying to local institutions had to wait for two to three months before receiving replies.

He said the recently-launched student e-Pass for foreign students to submit their applications online was in line with the one-month processing deadline.

The e-Pass is processed together with the Immigration authorities to speed up visa approvals.

He added that the move would counter criticism that the ministry would not be able to reach its goal of recruiting 100,000 foreign students into local universities by 2010 due to bureaucracy.

There are 7,200 new foreign students at local institutions in the current 2006-2007 academic session, compared with 5,700 in the 2004-2005 session.

In total, there are 52,000 foreign students here, and this was expected to increase to 66,000 next year, he added.

On recruitment of qualified teaching staff for universities, he said the ministry had facilitated a three-day open recruitment fair in KL Sentral last month, at which all public universities were represented.

A total of 1,558 people were interviewed and 125 of them were hired on the spot as lecturers, including seven non-citizens. He said most of them had past experience in government and private sector jobs.

The ministry has also given scholarships to lecturers to pursue doctorate (255 people) and masters (219) degrees.

It aims to train 6,100 PhD-qualified lecturers, or 60 per cent of local academic personnel, by 2010 in line with the country's aspirations to be an education hub.