

Connecting the Commonwealth through research partnerships

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Governments now, more than ever, aspire to restructure their higher education systems to maximise their contribution to overall economic development and competitiveness (Symaco, 2012). In this regard, international collaboration and partnership in research is widely seen as a key strategy and as a useful vehicle for research capacity building. Stephens (2009), for example, presents a number of informative and reflective accounts of the experience of international university research links supported by the British Council over the last two decades. Contributors to Martin and Bray (2011) also examine emergent issues and priorities relating to the development of tertiary education, including research partnerships, in small states worldwide.

In this rapidly moving international context the Malaysian Government is looking to the education sector, and particularly higher education, to equip its future workforce with the advanced

skills needed to realise its aim of becoming a high-income nation by the year 2020 – otherwise known as Vision 2020. Substantial efforts are being made to make Malaysia the centre of educational excellence in South East Asia. Educational policies that support such developments include the provision of greater autonomy for public universities. The oldest university in the country, the University of Malaya, is thus emphasising the enhancement of the quality of both teaching and research, partly through strengthened partnerships and links with other institutions both at home and overseas. Research clusters and centres within the university provide a platform for academic and industry personnel to collaborate and to engage in research designed to support the achievement of Vision 2020.

The Centre for Research in International and Comparative Education (CRICE), formally launched in March 2012, is one of the



Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma and HRH the Prince of Wales at a gathering of Commonwealth Scholars (2010)

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most recently inaugurated research centres at the University of Malaya. Commonwealth links with colleagues from the University of Oxford and the University of Bristol in the UK helped to support its initial work and will continue to facilitate ongoing collaboration and future research partnerships.

The mission and work of CRICE focuses on research in international and comparative education. This includes studies of the contribution of education to the knowledge economy; issues of access, equity and inclusivity in education; school effectiveness; gender and achievement; the processes of teaching and learning; and issues relating to culture and religion in education. It is envisioned that the Centre will help to overcome the relative dearth in the region of locally grounded and conducted research in this field. The Centre also aims to pioneer work on how related and contributing disciplines to educational studies – such as history, economics, geography and sociology – can contribute to the analysis, understanding and improvement of future educational policy and practice. The key objectives of CRICE are therefore to: (a) promote the development of multidisciplinary research capacity in Malaysia in international and comparative education; (b) investigate key priorities relating to national and regional educational policy and practice, and (c) advance the development of comparative education research and international research partnerships, especially in relation to the South East Asia region.

To support the dissemination of research, in 2012 CRICE launched a new *Journal of International and Comparative Education* (JICE) that also focuses on work of direct relevance to South East Asia. This peer-reviewed journal aims to publish work of interest to policy-makers and practitioners in addition to the academic community, and submissions from Commonwealth scholars, neighbours and partners are widely encouraged. The inaugural issue, published in March, includes articles on research capacity-building and the dilemmas of international transfer; the contribution of higher education as a humanitarian response; the importance of philosophy in educational research; and higher education in the Philippines and Malaysia, among others.

CRICE also plans to build on its founding keynote presentations delivered in 2012 and hold a series of annual lectures, panel discussions and open events to serve as a platform for critical, and public, engagement on issues of contemporary educational relevance within the home region. In this respect, the Centre looks forward to building and strengthening research partnerships with Commonwealth and other agencies and personnel, and it welcomes ideas and proposals for future links and collaboration.

References

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