UCSI’s MyCenTHE boost for tourism

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysia Centre of Excellence for Tourism and Hospitality Education (MyCenTHE), launched in August, is expected to raise standards in the tourism and hospitality industry via its robust training programmes.

MyCenTHE was originally Entry Point Project (EPP) 10, one of the 131 projects under the government’s Economic Transformation Programme (ETP).

EPP 10 was under the education National Key Economic Area, launched in November 2010, which aims to create 50,000 workers annually within the hotel and tourism industry and raise the sector’s average wage to RM4,000, both by 2020.

In May this year, MyCenTHE was established as a centre to house EPP10.

UCSI University is spearheading EPP 10 to improve the quality and quantity of workers within Malaysia’s hospitality and tourism industry.

MyCenTHE will allow hotel schools to work closely with the industry as well as the higher education, tourism and human resources ministries to meet future demand in the workforce while fine-tuning their curriculum according to current requirements.

MyCenTHE is made up of an independent management team and cluster leaders who work together to establish the work-based learning curriculum and spread it throughout the country, creating high-value jobs, career pathways and business opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry to support the national agenda of building a high-income nation.

"We have created a very robust, first of its kind work-based learning programme in hotel management, it’s all ready. “MyCenTHE has these programmes ready that attract a lot of industry players to be part of and to sign an agreement or contracts to assure jobs as well as a monthly allowance," said the centre’s chairman, Dr Wong Kong-Yew, during a recent interview with The Edge Financial Daily.

KDU College University, Taylor’s University College and YTL College of Hotel Management have also joined MyCenTHE.

While UCSI University has its own hotels for training, other schools have either their own hotels or collaborate with others to train their students.

Students under the MyCenTHE programme have two options: part-time or full-time learning and throughout the programme, students will receive a salary during their internship in hotels.

The payment students receive will provide for their living expenses. Coupled with a National Higher Education Fund loan, which would cover up to a maximum of RM24,000 for a three- or a 2½-year diploma programme, this is expected to attract students from all walks of life.

"This is a very significant milestone. You never see this. Interns usually don’t get paid... they are getting full-time salary [during the periods they work]. You don’t get this anywhere else. And also top hotel schools have already come on board," said Wong.

The first intake for the programme was in May, capped at 25 students but later increased to 39 due to high demand.

The students’ response has been positive to both UCSI University and the three ministries involved.

"With all these participating hotel schools and training hotels, the numbers will jump very fast by January next year," added Wong. UCSI University is making further efforts to reduce financial barriers by keeping fees lower than the industry average of RM38,000 at RM27,000 for the 2½-year programme.

This is part of UCSI University’s blue ocean strategy, as Julian J John, manager of corporate affairs projects put it, “It is to reinvent the way you do business, to reinvent your services and your products.”

“And instead of keeping it to ourselves, we’re being pioneers and we’re trying to lead the group. We see this as more than just a business as it is also on the national agenda,” he added.

Wong said the blue ocean strategy approach will not only redesign the landscape of the hospitality education in the country as with hotel schools, the government and the industry coming together, this will ensure that EPP 10’s goals are achieved.