



COVID-19 RESEARCH GRANT BY MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Response by UCSI University

We welcome this timely and important move by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to engage the academics in universities in providing an input as to the best ways to confront the current COVID-19 pandemic and to best prepare the country for its aftermaths, which seem likely to be most substantial and disruptive.

There is a great deal of expertise and experience in the universities in the areas identified by MOHE. This would put to reality the idea and the need for evidence-based policies, that policies should be adopted and pursued based on facts and figures which have been adequately and properly scrutinised. This would prevent the various about turns and inappropriate actions seen lately, which can only add to confusion and even frustration in the community.

The areas identified for research can also be deemed as an effort to bring about a 'Whole-of-Government' and a 'Whole-of-Community' approach to confront this major national threat. This approach has been advocated by the Academy of Medicine in its recent Press Release. We are now seeing the Whole-of-Government approach taking shape, that this lockdown is not a shutdown. It has to be more than just 'Stay at home' or 'Maintain physical (social) distance'.

Economic and social engagement must be gradually and carefully re-activated, soon. Whole-of-Community approach needs to be explored further. Even now there are many good Samaritans in our community, giving support to the front-liners and to the lonely. This can be further enlarged, getting and appealing to most of the community to feel moved to join in in this war against COVID-19. A systematic and rigorous way need to be found to make this happen widely.

The areas identified for research should also include social cohesion and personal integrity because it requires everyone to demonstrate their personal conscience and sense of responsibility. This war against COVID-19 demands as much a technological and economic response as a social, ethical and moral response. In the education field, it should involve formal and informal education. This is a good time, as any, to inculcate the Meaning and Values into education.

It is good that environment is one of the areas identified. As more and more of the environment is disturbed (demolished?), we shall be more exposed and made vulnerable to more and more of these kinds of epidemics/pandemics expedited through global warming, environmental degradation and pollution. The closer and more frequent contacts between man and wild animals would predispose us to zoonosis unheard of before.

Thus we need to be more rigorous, careful and conscientious in our environmental management. It is awesome to witness that the environment is healing over a very short time during the MCO, despite or because of COVID-19!

At UCSI University, we have already set-up a 'Post-COVID TaskForce' looking at areas, some of which are identified in the MOHE call for research proposals. We shall be very much delighted to participate in areas of economy, education, IT and tourism in this MOHE exercise.

Academician Senior Professor Dato' Dr Khalid Yusoff, FASc
Vice-Chancellor and President, UCSI University