

# Brunei Darussalam

## *Thammika Songkhaeo and Loke Hoe Yeong*

### I. A Brief Description of Brunei's Higher Education System

Brunei's higher education system, similar to the rest of its education system, relies on the national philosophy *Melayu Islam Beraja*, or the Malay Muslim Monarchy. All four state universities - Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD; established in 1985), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA; established in 2007), Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB; established in 1986 and upgraded to a university in 2008), and Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPUSB; established in 2007) - are fully funded by the government, and all, except for the Institut Teknologi Brunei, are located in the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. As of 2013, the percentage of total enrollment in tertiary education was 25 percent<sup>1</sup>. His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah acts as the chancellor of universities, appointing their heads. UBD, UNISSA and ITB are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, while KUPU SB, a religious teachers' university, is under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. UBD and UNISSA employ English as the language of instruction, while ITB and KUPUSB teach students in Malay and/or Arabic. In 2012, the Brunei Polytechnic was established, with seven technical or vocational schools and colleges<sup>2</sup>. In addition to these institutes, as of 2008, there were also 41 learning centers, under the responsibility of the Department of Technical Education, to provide continuing education<sup>3</sup>.

Brunei's higher education system is well-regulated, compared to many of its ASEAN peers'. There is the National Accreditation Council, chaired by the Minister of Education, which evaluates and assesses qualifications of the universities, and there is the Technical and Vocational Council, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Education, which does the same for technical and vocational institutes<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, Brunei has structured its universities such that each has a specialty. UBD offers the widest range of programs, in arts, business, engineering, health science, science and education; ITB focuses on engineering, business, and computing; UNISSA concentrates on Islamic learning; and KUPU SB trains and educates religious teachers<sup>5</sup>.

Visions and reforms of Brunei's higher education system have been embedded as part of two national plans: Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad Ke-21 (SPN 21), or National Education System for the 21st Century, and Wawasan 2035, or Brunei Vision 2035. SPN 21 aims to enhance the education structure, increase opportunities in technical education, improve curriculum, and enhance assessment, in order to create multiple pathways for students to progress from secondary to higher education. The structure established by SPN 21 would enable students of any kind of post-secondary education, including TVET graduates, to pursue a university degree or further education<sup>6</sup>. Brunei Vision 2035, meanwhile, aims to transfer Brunei's economy from one heavily dependent on oil and natural-gas to resources to one relying

---

<sup>1</sup> "Gross Enrolment Ratio, Tertiary, Both Sexes (%)". 2016. *World Bank*. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR/countries>.

<sup>2</sup> "Universiti Teknologi Brunei". 2016. *Itb.Edu.Bn*. <http://www.itb.edu.bn/>.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO. 2011. *Brunei Darussalam*. World Data On Education.

[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Brunei\\_Darussalam.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Brunei_Darussalam.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> "Universiti Teknologi Brunei". 2016. *Itb.Edu.Bn*. <http://www.itb.edu.bn/>.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO. 2011. *Brunei Darussalam*. World Data On Education.

[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Brunei\\_Darussalam.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Brunei_Darussalam.pdf).

on other services and industries. (Prior to Wawasan 2035, the government relied on five-year development plans. Aware that Brunei's oil reserves and natural-gas resources are expected to run out by approximately twenty or thirty years, the government is aiming to develop the economy based on non-energy-based services and industries<sup>7</sup>.)

In 2009, net student enrollment in higher education was 13.8%, an amount which was insufficient for Brunei's development plans. The government desired to increase this amount to 30% by 2014. It increased the number of pathways for secondary education students to access higher education, realizing that there were insufficient places in public universities, of which Brunei possessed only three at the time of Wawasan 2035's declaration (a fourth university was later established, being upgraded from an institute status)<sup>8</sup>. Even so, by 2014, the gross enrolment ration in tertiary institutions was still only 25%<sup>9</sup>. Brunei's government has been supplying scholarships for students to study abroad in private higher education institutions, since spaces in public institutions are still limited<sup>10</sup>.

### **Major contemporary issues**

#### *Information and Communications Technology*

The Sultan of Brunei and the Ministry of Education emphasize the role of information and communications technology (ICT) in both teaching and learning in Brunei<sup>11,12,13</sup>. In 2008, an e-Learning Systems project was introduced, to allow higher education institutions to electronically distribute learning materials. The project aimed to provide the benefits of internet technologies to enhance learning and teaching. When educators and administrators were interviewed about e-learning, the Ministry of Education found that higher education institutes would benefit from ICT Common Standards and Tools, greater awareness of ICT in education, and incentives to provide greater ICT. Later in 2009, UBD launched the Automated Lecture Capture and Publishing System (ALCAPS), which facilitated the recording of lecture sessions, which were made available on the MoE website<sup>14</sup>.

#### *Science, technology and innovation education and training programs*

Science, technology and innovation education have been at the core of Brunei's education goals. The government aimed to bolster science and technology education in order to reach a 60:40 ratio of science to arts students, and allocated BND 165 million, or approximately USD 118 million to finance the implementation of science and technology research projects between 2007 and 2012<sup>15</sup>. UBD is the main university through which research is being promoted. In 2011, the university launched advanced research methodology courses, targeting research in alternative energy and behavioral sciences, and it is now working to apply its research to various fields, including education and learning<sup>16</sup>.

#### *Expansion of private institutions*

---

<sup>7</sup> "Thinking Of Its Future". 2008. *The Economist*. <http://www.economist.com/node/10881541>.

<sup>8</sup> "Universiti Teknologi Brunei". 2016. *Itb.Edu.Bn*. <http://www.itb.edu.bn/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Gross Enrolment Ratio, Tertiary, Both Sexes (%)". 2016. *World Bank*. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>.

<sup>10</sup> "Universiti Teknologi Brunei". 2016. *Itb.Edu.Bn*. <http://www.itb.edu.bn/>.

<sup>11</sup> *The Report: Brunei*. 2013. London: Oxford Business Group.

<sup>12</sup> "Download PDFs Files". 2016. *MOE*. <http://www.moe.gov.bn/SitePages/Download%20PDFs%20Files.aspx>.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Education. 2012. *Strategic Plan 2012-2017*. Ministry of Education.

<sup>14</sup> Regulatory frameworks for distance education: a pilot study in the Southwest Pacific/South East Asia Region: final report

<sup>15</sup> Regulatory frameworks for distance education: a pilot study in the Southwest Pacific/South East Asia Region.

<sup>16</sup> *The Report: Brunei Darussalam*. 2011. London: Oxford Business Group.

Because spaces in private universities are limited, some Bruneian students resort to private institutions. There has been a growing need for TVET particularly in the areas of business and information technology, and private institutions have been fast to supply courses and degrees on those subjects, through both full-time and part-time degrees<sup>17,18</sup>.

## II. The Financing of Higher Education

The Ministry of Education received a budget of BN\$786.748 million in 2015<sup>19</sup>. Earlier, for the National Development Plan for 2007-2012, education was given BN\$822 million (USD\$564.3 million) (3.2% of 2012 GDP<sup>20</sup>), in addition to BN\$295 million (USD\$202.5 million) allocated for human resources development<sup>21</sup>.

**Table 1. Higher Education Expenses in Brunei, Borne by Parents and Students First Degree, Academic Year 2015-16 - Instructional expenses for one academic year**

[National currency Brunei dollar (B\$) converted to \$US by 2011 ICP Purchasing Power Parity Estimate at US\$1 = B\$ 0.72]

### NB. Fees given as for Brunei citizens

	Public		Private	
	Medium cost UBD: "Non-laboratory based" degree <sup>22</sup>	High cost UBD: Medicine degree (first degree) <sup>23</sup>	Medium cost IGS College <sup>24</sup>	High cost Laksamana College of Business <sup>25</sup>
Tuition fees	B\$ 3,000 (US\$ 2,160)	B\$ 10,000 (US\$ 7,200)	B\$ 3,600 (US\$ 2,592)	B\$ 9,500 (US\$ 6,840)
Other fees	B\$ 260	B\$ 260	-	-
Books	B \$200	B \$300	B \$200	B \$300
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>B\$3,460</b>	<b>B\$10,560</b>	<b>B\$3,800</b>	<b>B\$9,800</b>
Lodging <sup>26</sup>	B\$400	B\$400	B\$400	B\$400
Food <sup>27</sup>	B\$2555	B\$2555	B\$2555	B\$2555
Transport <sup>28</sup>	B\$1460	B\$1460	B\$1460	B\$1460
Other personal <sup>29</sup>	B\$3500	B\$3500	B\$3500	B\$3500
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>B\$7915</b>	<b>B\$7915</b>	<b>B\$7915</b>	<b>B\$7915</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>B\$11,375</b>	<b>B\$18,475</b>	<b>B\$11,715</b>	<b>B\$17,715</b>

<sup>17</sup> "Our History". 2016. *IGS College of Brunei Darussalam*. <http://www.igsbrunei.edu.bn/our-history/>.

<sup>18</sup> *The Report: Brunei Darussalam*. 2011. London: Oxford Business Group.

<sup>19</sup> "\$5.7B National Budget Passed". 2015. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/frontpage-news-national/2015/03/22/5-7b-national-budget-passed>.

<sup>20</sup> "Expenditure on Education As % Of GDP (From Government Sources)". 2016. *UNESCO*. Accessed July 4. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/?queryid=181>.

<sup>21</sup> *The Report: Brunei Darussalam*. 2009. London: Oxford Business Group.

<sup>22</sup> "Governance". 2016. *Universiti Brunei Darussalam*. Accessed July 4. <http://www.ubd.edu.bn/governance/administrative-services/bursar-office/tuition-fees/undergraduate-programmes/>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>24</sup> Diploma in business, computing or finance. "IGS College Records 100 Per Cent Increase In September Enrolment". 2011. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2011/09/13/igs-college-records-100-cent-increase-september-enrolment>.

<sup>25</sup> Undergraduate degrees in the fields of business and computing, offering certificates from the University of Chester, UK: "Laksamana Gets Government Nod To Offer British Degrees". 2014. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2014/10/04/laksamana-gets-gov%E2%80%99t-nod-offer-british-degrees>.

<sup>26</sup> "Campus Life". 2016. *Universiti Brunei Darussalam*. <http://www.ubd.edu.bn/campus-life/student-life/accommodation/>.

<sup>27</sup> "In Pursuit Of Cheaper Eats". 2011. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/business-national/2011/05/22/pursuit-cheaper-eats>.

<sup>28</sup> Planet, Lonely. 2016. "Getting Around Bandar Seri Begawan By Bus". *Lonely Planet*. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/brunei-darussalam/bandar-seri-begawan/transport/getting-around/bus>.

<sup>29</sup> *Universiti Brunei Darussalam*. 2016. Ebook. 1st ed. Accessed July 4.

[http://www.als.hku.hk/admission/exchange/file/partner/8966/Student\\_Exchange\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_v2.pdf](http://www.als.hku.hk/admission/exchange/file/partner/8966/Student_Exchange_Fact_Sheet_v2.pdf).

### Trends in tuitions fees

Tuition fees in Brunei continue to be highly controlled by the government, with no drastic spikes in tuition fees as in neighboring countries. The government continues to encourage students to pursue higher education by providing many scholarships, especially to foreign universities, if the students will be studying areas in-demand by the economy, such as law, medicine, engineering and other technical fields.

### III. Financial Assistance

There are many scholarships, grants, and loan options for Brunei citizens and permanent residents. Higher education for them, as a result, seems to be almost certainly free, and scholarships can sometimes even include an allowance.

In 2011, the Sultan of Brunei announced that scholarships would be awarded to students wishing to study in private TVET institutions. Many of such students are also those who would not be able to attend public universities because of their academic ability, but they are also those who cannot afford private higher education in general<sup>30</sup>. In conjunction with Brunei Vision 2035, these Technical and Vocational Education Scholarships, or "BTPV Scholarships," are being offered to Bruneian students and permanent residents who have passed their 'O' and 'A' Level exams and intend to study full-time at TVET institutes. The scholarship covers one hundred percent of tuition fees and commissioned by the Department of Economic Planning and Development<sup>3132</sup>.

The Department of Economic Planning and Development also commissions Human Capacity Building Scheme in the Private Sector Scholarships, or "PSTS Scholarships," which aim to increase workers' knowledge and increase human resource capacity in Brunei. The PSTS scholarship scheme comprises two sub-schemes: the academic enhancement sub-scheme, which provides scholarships for students to study at the Higher National Diploma, Degree, and Postgraduate levels, and the professional sub-scheme, which provides scholarships for students to undergo professional courses recognized both locally and internationally. In 2012, the year of the first intake, 278 applicants were awarded these scholarships<sup>33</sup>.

There are also government scholarships for Bruneians to study abroad. These scholarships often target particular groups. For instance, in between 2008 and 2012, the government spent BND\$103.7 million for more than 500 government officials to obtain masters and doctoral degrees, under the Programme and Professional Development of Experts. And through the Special Scholarship Fund of Human Resources, the government spent approximately \$104.2 million during the same period, to send 135 students to pursue studies at Advanced Level, 429 students to pursue their bachelor's degrees, and 88 students to pursue master's degrees abroad<sup>34</sup>.

Bruneian students on government scholarships often for study abroad leave on a bonded term. However, there have been issues of them not returning to Brunei after graduation, and these scholars have been condemned by many as irresponsible individuals. There is belief in Brunei that the scholars owe the

---

<sup>30</sup> *The Report: Brunei*. 2013. London: Oxford Business Group.

<sup>31</sup> "Homepage". 2016. *Kemuda Institute*. Accessed July 4. <http://main.kemudainstitute.com/jpke.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Apply For September'S Intake Of The BPTV Scholarships Today". 2015. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2015/06/28/apply-september%E2%80%99s-intake-bptv-scholarships-today>.

<sup>33</sup> "278 Apply For 'Human Capacity Building Scheme'". 2012. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2012/07/09/278-apply-human-capacity-building-scheme>.

<sup>34</sup> "Budget Allocation towards Improving Human Capacity in Nation Building". 2012. *Ministry Of Finance*.

<http://www.mof.gov.bn/index.php/news/263-budget-allocation-towards-improving-human-capacity-in-nation-building#sthash.CKdufl9G.dpuf>.

country their new knowledge and should come back for Brunei's development, particularly since Brunei is a small country without many resources and needs to rely on its human capital. An article in the Brunei Times has suggested that the "The Ministry of Education has not been transparent about how many bonded scholars secured jobs once they return to Brunei." Questions asked include: "How long did these bonded scholars wait before they were posted? Are these scholars working in jobs that correlate to their qualifications? Does the government identify whether there are jobs available in specific areas before awarding bonded scholarships?" It remains unclear how bonded scholars are treated professionally when they return – an issue that might cause many to remain abroad<sup>35</sup>.

For students unable to secure scholarships, since August 2014, the Bruneian government has implemented a loan program, known as 'Education Loan Assistance Scheme,' for students to study locally or overseas. The loan covers both tuition fees and living expenses. A student who obtains a bachelor's degree with First Class (Honors) will see the loan transformed into a government scholarship, and their requirement to pay back the loan in full will be removed. The government, however, will reserve "the right to insist employing that student in the government sector in priority over the private sector."<sup>36</sup> Between 2014 and September 2015 Over 400 students applied, with 141 students – 90 women and 51 men - being awarded the loan. These students will be studying abroad in countries including the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia, in fields such as courses in sciences, engineering, business, medicine, information technology, and the arts, and some have been accepted into prominent institutions, like Imperial College London and Stanford University.

There are rigid criteria for applying for the loan: all applicants must pursue a course that is of high priority for Brunei's needs (a list of such courses can be obtained through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs). Applications for the courses excluded from list will need further consideration. The course duration also must be a maximum of three years, or for the period required by that course<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> "What Ails Brunei's Scholarship Scheme?". 2013. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/bookmarks/2013/09/20/where-are-bruneis-scholarship-students>.

<sup>36</sup> "Moe Statement on New Education Loan Facility". 2014. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/bookmarks-breaking/2014/08/15/just-moe-statement-new-education-loan-facility>.

<sup>37</sup> "141 Students Awarded Loan Under New Education Facility". 2015. *The Brunei Times*. <http://www.bt.com.bn/frontpage-news-national/2015/02/12/141-students-awarded-loan-under-new-education-facility>.