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## Second chance

By TAN SHIOW CHIN

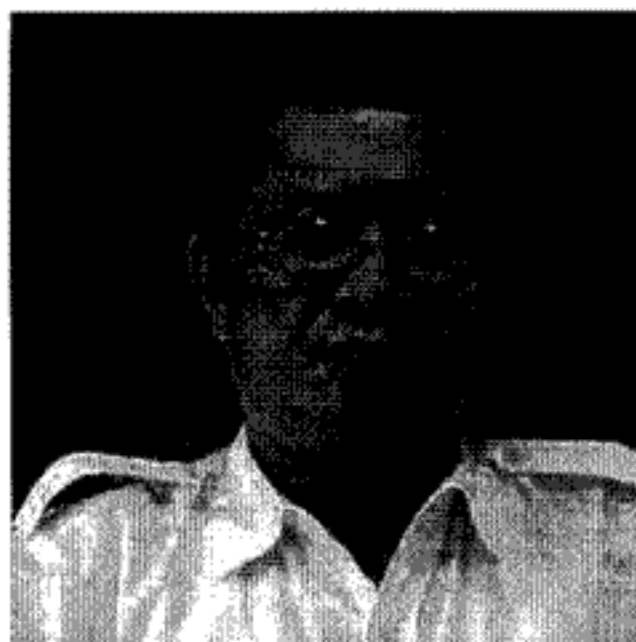
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MALAYSIA Airlines was not the first to come up with the idea of selling off excess seats or places that otherwise would not be utilised, at more affordable prices.

The Higher Opportunities for Private Education (HOPE) programme, which began in late 2006, employs the same concept with places in degree, diploma and foundation courses in private institutions of higher education.

Aimed at students who did not succeed in getting places in public universities, the programme offers them a second chance to pursue courses of their choice in selected private tertiary institutions at subsidised rates.

"We aim to give those students who didn't make it into public universities an alternative pathway," explains the programme's patron and adviser, Datuk Ong Tee Keat.



»We give those students who couldn't make it into public universities an alternative pathway« DATUK ONG TEE KEAT

Ong stresses that the participating institutions are not asked to create

adversely affects their business.

"We are merely tapping the excess capacity of the respective participating institutions," he says.

Because of this, the programme does not offer places in critical courses like medicine, dentistry and pharmacy because these are so popular that there are no excess places available.

"At the same time, we do take cognisance of affordability, that is, the higher fee structure of private institutions compared to that of public universities," says Ong.

"Because of that, through our internal subsidy system provided by the respective participating colleges and universities, we manage to offer courses at subsidised rates that are comparable to those of public universities, or maybe slightly higher, as some of the courses are 3+0 twinning programmes."

Ong adds that those who find it difficult to afford even the subsidised rates can also apply for PTPTN (National Higher Education Fund Corporation) loans.

The former Deputy Higher Education Minister and current Transport Minister also emphasises that the courses offered are approved by both the Higher Education Ministry and the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

"It is our duty to ensure that HOPE students stay competitive in the academic world as well as in their future career," says Ong, adding that he does not want the public to misconstrue that students who do not make it into public universities are inferior as they may not have made it due to a number of different factors.

Applicants applying with their Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia qualifications must meet the programme's minimum requirement of a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 and above, with at least five credit passes at Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) level.

In addition, they must also satisfy the requirements of the course they intend to enrol for, and attend an interview with the admission officers of the college they are applying to, and HOPE officers.

This year, HOPE is also offering post-SPM students a chance to join the programme.

Says Ong: "We need to cast our net wider.

"Many a time, parents are not adequately informed of the choices available. In view of the fact that that some SPM students may not be that interested in pursuing Form Six, would they have any other pathway?

"We are now exploring the availability of multiple pathways for such students."

Post-SPM students, along with UEC (Unified Examination Certificate) candidates, will be eligible to enter diploma and foundation courses if they score at least three credits in their respective exams.

The courses on offer range from engineering to early childcare education, and include business, IT, arts and design, and hotel management, among others. The degrees and diplomas are offered by the university colleges themselves or via twinning programmes with foreign partner universities.

So far, around 350 students have benefited from this programme, with another 350 accepted this year after the public university intake was announced.

A second intake is currently ongoing to meet the programme's target of around 500 students this year, while UEC students will have a separate intake at the end of the year.

With around 8,000 places pledged by the 12 participating institutions, there are plenty of places still available. Those interested can obtain more information or download the application form at [www.hope.org.my](http://www.hope.org.my).

Forms can also be collected from the programme's office at Sekretariat Program HOPE, Suite 2A-23A-2, Tingkat 23A, Blok 2A, Plaza Sentral, Jalan Stesen Sentral 5, 50470 Kuala Lumpur.

The deadline for the current intake is Oct 31.