

UniMAP 2025: Foresighting for a Frenzied Future

Harshita Aini Haroon & Zul Azhar Zahid Jamal^{a)}

^{a)} Vice Chancellor

Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia

Email: vc@unimap.edu.my

George Orwell, the English author, in his book called “Nineteen Eighty-Four” wrote about life set in the year 1984, painting a depressing picture of a world filled with propaganda, never-ending war, and a life occupied with pervasive scrutiny of one’s life by others. One of the tools Winston, the protagonist in the dystopian novel, has to contend with is the telescreen. Its functions are to monitor a person’s movement and capture their conversation where ever they may be, including in private places such as one’s own home. What is very compelling about the book, we find, is that it was written in 1949. Orwell was able to predict rather splendidly what he thought life would be like 35 years ahead of the time he wrote the book. Now, fast forward 69 years later, Orwell’s telescreen is really not very different from our smartphones and other social media devices. Our smartphones now not only keep information about us once we log in, but are able to gather information from our speeches even when we are not talking into it! Orwell’s 1984 is an epitome of foresight, as it is not only the *telescreen* in the novel that we can identify with in the 21st century, but many other aspects of the current sociopolitical goings-on in the world. If Orwell were still alive today, we would like to ask him– *what would higher education be like in the next ten years?*

In a world that is defined by constant change and transformation, we find that as much as we would like to believe that our past experiences are a reasonable guide to the future, we know that this no longer holds water. The uncertainty that we face today is not a temporary set-up, but rather a constant in the operating environment of the foreseeable future. Of course, this situation creates a sense of unease when it comes to charting the direction of UniMAP in the next ten years (never mind 69 years!). We have had to commit to certain scenarios for the future, so that we could make plans about what should be happening given the scenarios. The future that we found is a frenzied one. Adjectives such as *energetic, innovative, intense, intelligent, tumultuous, fast-moving, dynamic, and uncertain* come to mind easily, together with all things tech and the disruption that comes with them! The dominance of advanced technology in almost all that we do calls for “outside-in” thinking, especially given that we are mandated with a niche of engineering, engineering technology, technology, science and relevant areas, with emphasis on electronics. Technology, and by default, disruption in essence are right up our alley. We need to ensure that whatever prevails in the future, UniMAP will remain relevant and will continue to live up to its *raison d’être* of producing highly-skilled engineers to fulfil the Nation’s Industrial Blueprint. And so, early this year, after a rigorous review of our achievement, and doing an extensive scan of the futures, we launched a new strategic document - **UniMAP2025**.

UniMAP 2025 is the university’s response to Industry 4.0, and at the same time is our proactive approach in addressing systemic challenges in ensuring that the university remains relevant in the nation’s development agenda come 2025, and beyond. The systemic challenges we identified are categorised as individual competences, the university community, investment, governance, policies and continuous development. With these in mind, we structured UniMAP2025 into three strategic goals and four enablers, based on the

fundamental concept of partnerships. The three strategic goals are: Innovation-led teaching, Industry-ready graduates and Translational research. The four enablers, meanwhile, are Wealth creation, Talent-excellence, Enhancing infrastructure and Strengthening infostructure. Each of these hasitsown strategic objectives (with a total of 24 strategic objectives), the achievement for which will be measured against the relevant key performance indicators and targets set for each of the implementation phases.

UniMAP in 2025 will be associated with several key traits that will be the result of the processes we run. Underlying the key traits is our desire to be the champion of sustainability – not just in our output and outcome, but also in our processes. Firstly, we expect that we will be known as growth partners to key stakeholders, and likewise that we have on board with us several growth partners that will help us become stronger. These partners will comprise a broad section of the community and not confined to industries. In other words, we will walk the talk of quadruple helix where as a learning organisation, the university as representing the academia will grow together with the community, the industry, and the government.

Secondly, it is our aspiration that we will be tech-focused in all that we do, not limited to the teaching and learning processes but also in our everyday operations as a higher education institution. To be able to get to this stage, we need to also be innovation-centric. As such, the university will endeavour to support innovative undertakings that will bring benefit to the university and beyond. Key to this aspiration is also the need for us to be entrepreneurial, not just for the sake of our sustainability but also in the ways that we work every day. We do not know what the world demands will be upon us even in the next five years, but I am confident that if we have entrepreneurial mind set and the will to move on from there, we will be able to come out from the new demands in a way that will give us an advantage over others.

We also want to be known as an institution with eminent talent, and one that produces such people. In order to produce graduates who will be on the top of the list for employers, it is incumbent upon UniMAP to ensure that first and foremost, the talent that we have as our human resource are top-notch. Many initiatives in the plan will require our staff to undergo continuous professional development programmes, and experience growth as they go along. Whichever approach applies, it is important that the university provides them with opportunities for this to happen. Only by building within, we can then build externally. Our decisions in this matter are guided by the World Economic Forum (2016) publication on the top ten skills needed for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)¹. It is also our vision that UniMAP plays a central role in the lives of the local community and the region. This can happen in many ways, be it from the socio-economic perspective as well as general well-being. This should be a unique value that UniMAP brings to the larger community, beyond the academic community. For example, we are already involved in enhancing the economies of harumanis entrepreneurs in the state of Perlis through our agrotech initiatives. We believe there is more that we can do, the result for which should be visible by 2025.

With these in place, then the recognition will come naturally, which would cover a broad scope. We are talking about recognition by the general public on the value that

¹Cognitive flexibility, negotiation, service orientation, judgement and decision making, emotional intelligence, coordinating with others, people management, creativity, critical thinking, complex problem solving (Future of Jobs Report, World Economic Forum 2016. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs>)

UniMAP as a technical university brings to them, and also recognition by key industries and also the government on the kind of talent that we produce and the research that we do that place the nation on a very competitive position. It is our vision that we are recognised as a key global player when it comes to the production of engineering and technical talents, as well as in making the world a better place through the research that we do.

All these aspirations, at the end of the day, require us to ensure that we provide quality services to our stakeholders. Operating in a small state of Perlis, we are very aware of our presence and the role we play as a public institution. We know that everyone is watching us and as such, it is only right that we become exemplars of quality service providers to the rest of Perlis. Beyond that, experience has shown us over and over again that it is the level of service quality that makes the difference between a good and a not-so-good organization.

In terms of implementation, we have ensured that the right mechanisms are in place. We have rolled out the plan to everyone, and we have carved initiatives and corresponding plans of action. Our quarterly reporting and review platforms will be able to inform us how we are doing and guide us on our future plans. It is our hope that the frenzied future will recognise UniMAP in 2025 as a space for mutualistic growth– for the individual staff member, for the students, for the academia, for the community, for the industry, for the nation and also for global citizens alike.

Despite UniMAP 2025, however, we acknowledge that the dynamism of higher education has moved up another level altogether, due to advances in technology. As such, anticipating future scenarios will have to become our new normal in our efforts to remain relevant.