

VOICES FROM THE INDUSTRY

The Role of Legal Officers of Public Universities Malaysia in Energy Law, Policies and Compliance

The legal department and its legal officer in public universities play a significant role in ensuring and monitoring the development, planning, and execution of public universities' functions and operations within the boundaries of law and regulations, especially in energy law, policies, and compliance. As institutions that consume significant amounts of energy in research and development, teaching, and operational activities, public universities are bound by national energy policies and sustainability commitments. Legal officers are essential in navigating, monitoring, and assisting the complex legal landscape surrounding energy usage, procurement, and sustainability initiatives.

These professionals ensure the university's adherence to energy-related legislation, including compliance with the Electricity Supply Act 1990 [Act 447], Renewable Energy Act 2011 [Act 725], and recently, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act 2024 [Act 447], while at the same time abide by its core legislation as public universities through the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 [Act 30]. At the same time, they need to remain current and stay informed with any guidelines, policies, and instructions issued by any ministry and its agencies, like the Ministry of Energy Transition and Water Transformation (PETRA), Sustainable Energy Development Authority (SEDA), Energy Commission (ST), and others.

Recently, when the Malaysian Government launched the National Energy Policy 2022-2040 ("NEP") that aims to i) enhance macroeconomic resilience and energy security, ii) achieve social equitability and affordability, and iii) ensure environmental sustainability, public universities are not excluded from complying with and keeping in line with international development and standards in the energy transition space, including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy). For example, Universiti Malaya (UM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) were champions in introducing the Low Carbon Cities Framework (LCCF), while Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) implemented the UKM Sustainability Policy 2030.

The legal officer balances commercial and business profits with public interests and the right to access and seek tertiary education while vetting and drafting legal documentation and instruments like agreements, agendas, legal notation, etc. They oversee the legality and enforceability of energy agreements and partnerships, such as those involving renewable energy installations like solar power panels and systems and green campus initiatives, and guide energy efficiency curriculum and programs, such as at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) with its Centre for Education, Training, and Research in Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CETREE), actively engaging communities on renewable energy awareness and practices.

By fostering collaboration between academic, administrative, and legal departments, legal officers ensure that public universities are compliant and leaders in promoting sustainable energy practices, contributing to the nation's vision for a low-carbon economy.

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