

## REAL ESTATE GRADUATES IN MALAYSIAN CORPORATE COMPANIES

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### ABSTRACT:

In the 1970s and the 1980s, most of real estate graduates in Malaysia had been placed at the Valuation and Property Services Department (VPSD), Ministry of Finance. Later, the shift in real estate activities from individual to corporate participation however have encouraged real estate graduates to move forward to explore new challenges. This is the consequences of the establishment Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) securities listing, the practice of corporate real estate management and the changing perception on real estate investment against other investment means. Therefore, the study aimed to investigate the sufficiency of current real estate curriculum at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in fulfilling corporate companies' expectations. The corporate companies listed in Bursa Malaysia and real estate graduates with corporate working experience were surveyed in order to determine the sufficiency of our local real estate course in preparing students for real estate career. The results indicate that improvements on the syllabus are needed to prepare students for the recruitment in corporate companies. Besides that, types of real estate jobs offered by corporate companies and their requirements were also identified. The study reveals that there is a high demand from the corporate companies for real estate research and development skills from corporate companies. Another aspect that deserves a more serious consideration is generic skills. Finally, several suggestions have been made in order to address the insufficiency of the current real estate curriculum at UTM. These include improving the current subjects of research and development and adding new subjects that relate to strategic planning, presentation skills and communication skills to the current compulsory subjects.

**Keywords:** Real Estate Education, Curriculum Sufficiency, Real Estate Profession, Corporate Companies

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the early days, the main attention of training in the real estate profession in Malaysia is to produce competent valuers in order to fulfil the need of Valuation and Property Services Department (VPSD), Ministry of Finance. Although other aspects of the real estate are given such as real estate management, investment analysis, real estate development and so forth, the main focus of real estate education was property valuation. As the profession developed throughout the years, the focus of training has moved to a wider spectrum.

Real estate education, like any other area of education need to be constantly reviewed and re-evaluated in order to meet the current needs of the industry. This is very important to ensure the training provided is suitable and capable of preparing the students for the challenges bound to be faced. Due to that, it is very important for educators to determine the needs of the industry (Manning, 2002).

The rapid growth of real estate industry in Malaysia has lead to rapid development of all types of properties. Real estate activities have shifted from individual to corporate participation (Hishamuddin and Buang, 2006). Private companies and corporate bodies are now turning towards investing in properties and making the best out of their properties. Business managers are now beginning to recognise that real estate is a critically strategic asset for supporting the financial, work environment and operational needs of an organisation (Weatherhead, 1997). Therefore, the main aim of this study is to investigate the current real estate curriculum in fulfilling corporate companies' expectations. However, the scope of this study will only examine real estate education at the Department of Property Management (DPM), Faculty of Geoinformation Science and Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) as all real estate management programmes in Malaysia were accredited by the Board of Valuers, Appraiser and Estate Agents (BOVAEA).

## **2.0 CORPORATE REAL ESTATE SKILLS**

Many earlier studies of corporate real estate management (CREM) have drawn attention mainly on the significance cost saving of corporate facilities (Nourse, 1990; Joroff *et al.*, 1993; Manning and Roulac, 1999). However, over the past decade, the relationship between corporate real estate and corporate business activities had been given more attention as most of the corporations were unable to fully utilise corporate real estate as a core business asset (Roulac *et al.*, 2004). Real estate may be important to business, but real estate management requires skills that are normally different from those needed to run the core business profitably. Focusing on the core business has meant that many corporations have disregarded the role of real estate. Research has shown that many have very little idea of their property cost, the extent of their property interest or their value (Bannock and Partners, 1994). Therefore, corporate real estate skills have evolved from real estate operational and tactical aspects to more comprehensive and integrated role including strategic real estate decision making.

Roulac *et al.* (2003) assessed the perception of companies in the Ireland on the future knowledge and skills base required for strategic real estate decision-making. While Bon *et al.* (2002) undertake the annual research to determine the importance

of different areas of CREM knowledge and skills in the future. The results from both studies show that CREM covers a wide spectrum of skills and knowledge. The main points that have been made from both studies are as follows:-

- a) There are many similar skills appeared in both studies including:-
  - i. Strategic planning;
  - ii. Negotiation;
  - iii. Portfolio management;
  - iv. Performance measurement; and
  - v. Core business activities
- b) Both studies have demonstrated the higher rank of business skills compared to technical skills.
- c) Both studies recognised the important of strategic to tactical aspects of real estate management.

McNamara (2002) pointed out that real estate managers must place themselves at the centre of decision making in their businesses. According to Hishamuddin and Buang (2006), the early days of real estate profession in Malaysia, just after the Independence Day, started with a small group of professional serving the valuation division in Ministry of Finance (now known as Valuation and Property Services Department or VPSD) undertaking real estate valuation for statutory purposes. But their numbers were small and incapable of fulfilling the growing needs. Realising this, action to train our own local valuers was taken.

As most of our real estate system such as real estate laws, planning and taxation was influenced by the British system so did our real estate education. University Technology Mara (UiTM) was the first to start a diploma programme in real estate in 1967 while University Technology Malaysia (UTM) commenced the degree programme in 1973. Meanwhile, University Malaya began the first real estate programme at degree level in 1996. Some of the main subjects offered are principles and applied valuation, property law, land economic, property management, building maintenance and town and country planning.

Due to the limitation of this study, only real estate education provided by the Department of Property Management (DPM), Faculty of Geoinformation Science and Engineering, University Technology Malaysia (UTM) will be discussed. As mentioned before, UTM is one of the first universities to provide real estate education in Malaysia. The department have a history of 33 years of establishment and is now the pioneer university offering property management course at degree level in Malaysia.

According to Hishamuddin and Buang (2006) the university has played an important role in training real estate professionals for the industry and they have been well accepted by the public and private sectors. Most of the students graduating from the university hold important positions in the government VPSD and related government agencies as well as owners and major shareholders of many private valuation and property consultant firms in the country. The degree programme is designed towards meeting the needs of the industry. Therefore changes in the

curriculum and syllabus are occasionally reviewed to ensure its relevance to the need of the industry and to cater for the need of the developing nation. Due to that, over the years the course have experience various changes in teaching approach and syllabus.

The running of the programme by the department is supported by qualified academic staffs, which are trained in various disciplines to the field. Majority of the teaching staffs basically trained in the property valuation and management discipline who eventually major on other areas such as investment, finance, computer technology, etc. In order to ensure that students are exposed to the current trend in the field, academic staffs are encouraged to specialise in selected subjects areas through researches and undertaking consultancies for various organisations. The product of these activities is then channelled to writing and publication work.

### ***Degree Programme Structure***

According to the prospectus of FKSG (2006) the degree programme would be completed within 4 years programme on a full time basis. The running of the degree programme follows the semester system where each academic year consists of two semesters. The structures of the degree programme provided are shown in Table 1.

Apart from the main contact hours realised through lectures, tutorials and practical work, students are also exposed to related field work such as visits to the VPSD, the national valuation institute (INSPEN), local authorities, other public and private agencies and organisations with property and facilities management functions.

**Table 1:** List of Subjects for Bachelor of Science Property Management Programme at UTM

<b>Year 1 Semester I</b>	<b>Year 1 Semester II</b>
SGH 1022 Malaysian legal system	SGH 1563 Surveying and property information
SGH 1033 Computer application in property	SGH 1523 Law on contract agency and tort
SGH 1013 Property valuation principles	UHB 1**2 English for academic communication
<b>Year 1 Semester I</b>	<b>Year 1 Semester II</b>
SGH 1053 Building technology	SGH 1542 Land Economics
UHS 1**2 Islamic and Asian cultures I	UQ ***1 Co-curriculum 1
UHS 1**2 Islamic and Asian cultures II	SGH 1593 Planning and development
	SGH 1513 Applied valuation
<b>Year 2 Semester I</b>	<b>Year 2 Semester II</b>
SGH 2023 Property management	SGH 2553 Building maintenance and services
UHS 2**2 Elective university subject	UHB 2**2 Advanced English for academic communication
SGH 2033 Property law	SGH 2573 Rural land resources management
ULT 2**2 Islamic institution/ current Islamic issues	UQ ***1 Co-curriculum

SGH 2043 Urban economics	SGH 2533 Local government law
SGH 2013 Statutory valuation	SGH 2513 Valuation of special properties
<b>Year 3 Semester I</b>	<b>Year 3 Semester II</b>
SGH 3113 Property market research	SGH 3533 Seminar on industrial training
U**3**2 Entrepreneur development	SGH 3539 Industrial training
SGH 3093 Property marketing and agency	
UHB 3**2 English Language (elective)	
SGH 3043 Macro economic analysis on property	
SGH 3103 Property investment analysis	
<b>Year 4 Semester I</b>	<b>Year 4 Semester II</b>
SGH 4093 Professional practice	SGH 4553 Land acquisition practice
SGH 4013 Business valuation	SGH 4584 Special project 11
SGH 4113 Quantitative techniques for real estate	SGH 4503 Corporate real estate management
SGH 4172 Special project 1	SGH 4**3 Elective 1*
SGH 4**3 Elective 1*	SGH 4**3 Elective 11*
SGH 4**3 Elective II*	
<b>List of Unrestricted Electives</b>	
SGH 4853 Project management	
SGH 4833 GIS on property	
SGH 4883 Negotiation	
SGH 4933 Quality Management	
SGH 4953 Computer assisted mass appraisal	
SGH 4963 Facilities management	
SGH 4863 Property portfolio management	

Besides from academic training students are required to fulfil practical training and this have been planned in semester 6 of the degree programme. This 6-month industrial training period will enable students to experience the nature of the real estate field. Students must to apply for training in related private or public sector organisations. Most of the students are trained in valuation and property consultancy firms, property developers, government valuation departments, local authorities and other organisation dealing with properties. During the training period, students are required to record their experiences on a daily basis in a standard logbook. Students are also required to prepare a report on related areas of their experiences and present to the committee in order to pass the industrial training requirement.

Industrial training is view as an important part of the whole programme, because through this training student are given the chance to apply what they learn in classroom lecture to real world situation. Although traditional lectures are fine for providing a foundation and to some extent theory, for real estate education, they are wholly inadequate in and of themselves for providing students with a sufficient grounding in the market. "Applied" education clearly must be the preferred mode of instruction for graduate education

### 3.0 ISSUES SURROUNDING REAL ESTATE EDUCATION

Many issues regarding real estate education have been brought up by academics and practitioners throughout its existence. Some of these issues will be discussed here due to its importance towards the research. They are:-

- i. Non standardised nature of real estate education
- ii. Evaluation of real estate courses
- iii. The role finance and investment

#### ***Non-standardised Nature of Real Estate Education***

As mention early in the chapter, non-standardised nature of real estate education have been an issues haunting the profession for decades. Epley (1996) pointed out that, the area of teaching and research labelled “real estate” has struggled for many years to determine its body of knowledge and obtain a consensus of opinion.

Since 1980s when a major debate began to take place and real estate education began to take two separate paths: a multidisciplinary approach and a financial management approach Real estate educators were not in agreement on the state of the discipline. More importantly, as real estate struggled to find its place as part of the common body of knowledge in business administration, the entry level course covering a variety of real estate topics, Real Estate Principles, remained an elective in many of the programs (Cam and Rabianski, 1986).

In the 1990s, some educators continued to question the lack of evolution in the curriculum of existing real estate programs. In addition, research findings showed a glaring separation between curriculum requirements and constituent needs (Wells and Williams, 1993). Notwithstanding, several programs challenged the traditional teaching methods and curriculum, emphasizing that learning stood the best chance of occurring when lessons to be learned mimicked real-life situations (Butler *et al.*, 1998). Concurrently, some real estate educators agreed that real estate should have a social ethic to gain academic respectability

Today, the development and management of a graduate real estate program and its curriculum are limited by two common issues. First, among real estate academicians, there is a lack of agreement over a common body of knowledge that should form the core course offering for any program. Second, it appears that many curriculums are driven by faculty availability and the willingness to teach these classes, rather than the needs of the industry that will eventually employ the real estate graduate. For example, Weeks and Finch (2002) found that there does not appear to be a single real estate class offered uniformly by schools offering an undergraduate major in real estate. In addition, classes such as real estate law and real estate market analysis require specialization not often available in smaller business schools. There is, however, some consistency within a "typical" undergraduate real estate program. Real estate principles, finance, appraisal or valuation, law and investments are found in the typical undergraduate real estate program.

All these research clearly shows that, there has not been a standardised real estate education product that managed to receive agreement from all. Different researches and practitioners have their own set of idea real estate package. This is most probably due to the geographical and development differences. Due to that, it is suggested that education provider should design their real estate programme according to the industrial changes and needs.

### ***Evaluating Real Estate Courses***

Due to the non-standardised nature of real estate, it is the responsibility of educators is to continually explore ways to improve the curriculum at their institutions to ensure it meet the industrial needs. It is essential within any teaching environment that the quality of teaching is maintained at a high standard. Quality within the commercial world is basically being the success or failure of a business (Armitage, 1994). She provides a commercial definition of quality as "The subjective and objective attributes of a product or service, which satisfy customers' expectations and perceptions at the time of purchase and during the usable life of the product or service." The indicators of quality are the standards of the students and the willingness of industry to employ graduates from that university.

An evaluation of university teaching is not a straightforward assessment. A University has a mixture of different disciplines and students have different expectations from the University. Therefore, the University can only hope to set up a framework for the evaluation of teaching. The content of a paper or major is gauged not by the current student, but by the graduate. A lot of material taught may seem frivolous to the student while they are studying. However, the true value of what is taught can only be gauged once the student enters the workplace and puts theory into practice. According to Richards-Wilson (2002), a program's mission is validated and legitimized when companies hire its graduates

Callanan and McCarthy (2003) also point out that, the property industry is a changing environment with new regulations and requirements being introduced regularly. Therefore, for the graduates to be at the leading edge of the industry, the educators need to maximise the use of the students' time and prepare them to be adaptable to a changing workplace. This requires regular curriculum review in order to ensure that the educators are delivering the best program possible.

It should be noted that assessment of course sub-topic content is usually even more important in real estate courses than in many other business courses because subtopic coverage in real estate courses is usually less standardised or prescribed than in other business disciplines. McKone (1999) noted that courses in other business disciplines (e.g., finance) are often offered more frequently, are prerequisites for other courses necessitating the coverage of specific fundamental concepts and have multiple sections each semester requiring some level of sub-topic standardisation.

Vandell (2003) pointed out that education as in everything else, the only constant is change, and that is becoming increasingly true with time. If we can at

least prepare our students over the next 25 years to deal effectively, efficiently and ethically with that change, we will have succeeded.

## **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

### ***Questionnaires Survey***

For the purpose of this study, two set of questionnaires had been designed to collect responses from two different groups of respondents:-

- (i) real estate graduates, limited to those with working experience for corporate companies whom graduated from a local or foreign university with a bachelor degree or diploma in real estate management. Data related to education background, working experience with corporate company, opinions about our local real estate education and etc are asked in the questionnaires;
- (ii) corporate companies, limited to companies that are listed in the main board of *Bursa Malaysia* (BM). Question that have been asked are regarding the real estate jobs opportunities, real estate graduates employment, importance of real estate to the company, opinion about our local real estate education and etc.

Since questionnaire survey is adopted as one of the methodology for this study, the must important instrument for this study will be the questionnaires (Creswell, 2003). The first group of respondent, real estate graduates, are chosen randomly from the real estate graduates identified. Respondents have to meet two criteria: (i) have work experience for corporate company; (ii) graduated from a local or foreign university with a bachelor degree or diploma in real estate management. Real estate graduates were identified through information obtained from various companies human resource department. There are 27 graduates responded to the questionnaires.

The second group of respondents are corporate companies listed in the main board of BM. To identify these companies, a list of the corporate company listed in BM has been obtained from the library of BM. The total of top 150 companies was identified in order to reflect the population of listed companies in BM. However, the number of companies listed under different sector but belongs to the same parent companies are considered as one, for example YTL Cement Bhd, YTL Power International Bhd, YTL Corporation Bhd and YTL Land & Development Bhd is consider as one company. There are only 25 corporate companies responded to the questionnaires. Low response rate was not unexpected as the high number of refusals partly reflecting the relatively low priority or disinterest attached by many companies to the use of their real estate assets (Roulac *et al.*, 2003)

### ***Interviews Method***

Interview method is adopted in this study for the purpose of collecting more detail information from respondents so that a more in-depth study can be done. This can not be achieved by just carrying out questionnaires survey. This is essential, because respondents' opinion towards a question asked and detail reasons for



answers chosen in questionnaires, can only be obtained through interactive discussion. Interviews feedbacks, there for, are strong evidence for supporting questionnaires' analyses results. According to Bruwer, (1997) Interview is a good method for data gathering, it gives higher flexibility and accuracy. Information provided by the respondent will be easier to understand and suggestion and opinion can be better interpreted.

Interview sessions are carried out through face to face interview and telephone interview. Formal application letter for interview appointments were send along side questionnaires surveys questionnaires to respondents. Follow up phone calls were then made for confirmation of approval, date and time of interview and so on. According to Dillman (1978), communication through letter and phone calls for an appointment will increase the successfulness of the interview.

## 5.0 THE RESULTS

A total of 25 corporate companies responded to the questionnaires, as shown in Table 2. Most of the companies which responded to the survey are involved in the property business (44%), finance (20%) and industrial products companies (12%).

**Table 2: Companies' Core Business Activity**

Core Business Activities	Number of Companies	Percentage (%)
Property	10	44
Finance	5	20
Utility	1	4
Property and Services	1	4
Industrial Product	3	12
Property and Hotel	2	4
Retail and Hotel	1	4
REITs	2	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

### ***Profile of Real Estate Graduates***

Respondents must meet 2 criteria: (i) Have corporate working experience; (ii) Hold a diploma or higher qualification of a real estate course from any local and foreign university. There may be differences between our local real estate education and those provided overseas, these differences may provide valuables information for this study. The first group, which build up 70 percent of the respondents, are those who graduated from a local university and the rest are those who graduated from abroad.

Table 3 shows that most of the graduates graduated in between year 1996 to 2000. Where else, there were six graduates each graduating before 1990 and after 2000. Only four graduates graduated in 1990 to 1995. 96% of the respondents hold a degree in real estate management leaving only one diploma holder instead.

**Table 3: Year of Graduation**

Year of Graduation	Number	Percentage (%)
Before 1990	6	22
1990-1995	4	15
1996-2000	11	41
After 2000	6	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>

### ***The Sufficiency of Local Real Estate Course***

According to Manning (2002), the best way of carrying out course assessment is through graduates who have already applied the knowledge gained and through industries that employ these graduates. There for, to achieve the first objective it is essential to refer to feedbacks of both real estate graduates and corporate companies. The sufficiency of our local real estate course will be measure based on two factors: -

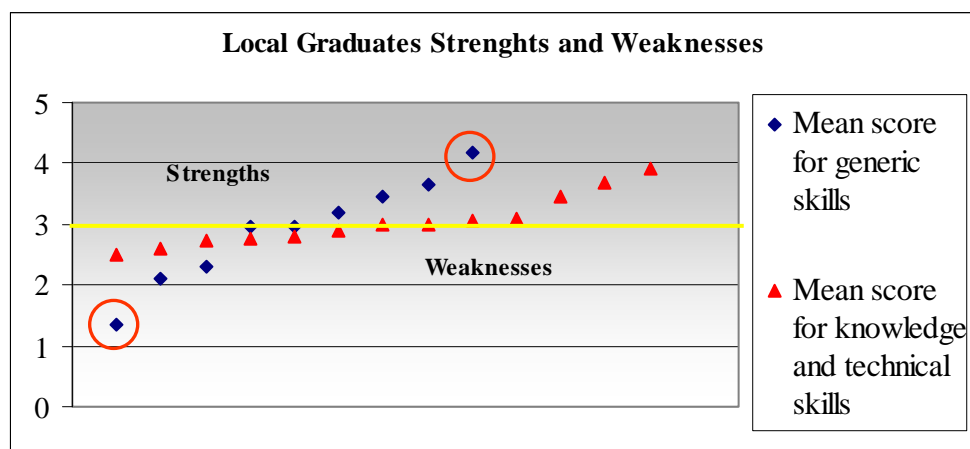
- i. Corporate managers' point of view – local real estate graduates work performance
- ii. Real estate graduates point of view – Sufficiency of the course studied in preparing them for corporate real estate jobs.

Table 4 shows the ranking of skills according to it mean scores, while Figure 1 present the score distribution for both skills group. For knowledge and technical skills, it was found that, Project management, valuation, and management skills top the list as graduates' strongest skills. This is rational, because local universities main focus of real estate education still falls on these areas. Whereas, accounting, investment, research and development and finance are areas that really raise the concern of managers. Local graduates are well at performing valuation task, but they have difficulties when dealing with investment and finance related matters. At the same time he also pointed out that, these two areas are very important for corporate companies.

**Table 4: Real Estate Graduates Main Strengths and Weaknesses**

			Minimum	Maximum	Mean
<b>Knowledge and Technical Skills</b>	1	Project Management	3	5	3.91
	2	Valuation	3	5	3.68
	3	Management	2	5	3.45
	4	Legal	2	5	3.09
	5	Marketing	2	4	3.05
	6	Business	3	3	3.00
	7	Design and Construction	2	4	3.00
	8	Facilities Management	2	4	3.00
	9	Finance	2	3	2.91
	10	Research & Development	2	3	2.78
	11	Investment	1	3	2.73

	12	Accounting	2	3	2.77
	13	Strategic planning	1	3	2.60
Generic Skills	14	Team Work	4	5	4.18
	15	ICT application	3	4	3.64
	16	Self Innovative	3	4	3.45
	17	Independence	2	4	3.18
	18	Leadership	1	4	2.95
	19	Communication skills	2	4	2.95
	20	Adoptability	1	4	2.57
	21	Negotiation Skills	2	4	2.30
	22	Presentation Skills	1	3	2.09
	23	English Proficiency	1	2	1.36



**Figure 1:** Local Graduates Strengths and Weaknesses Scores Distribution

In the other hand, team work ICT application and self innovation were graduates strongest generic skills, while their weakest are English proficiency, negotiation, presentation skills and adoptability. During interview sessions, many managers said that they found our graduates lack in the ability of applying theories into practical situation. Graduates have a wide theory base but when it comes to the real thing they have difficulties apply it. Managers think the reason behind this is the lack of hands on training. Besides, local graduates were said to have weaker English proficiency and presentation skills when compared to overseas graduates. In fact, they said that local graduates are very poor in report writing skills. Some overseas universities teach presentation techniques and business communication as compulsory subjects which has yet to be implemented here.

With the mean scores distribution of both skills group put together in Figure 1, two conclusions can be made. First, it was discovered that generic skills is both local graduates strongest and weakest skill. Second, graduates show mediocre in most of the knowledge and technical skills.

### ***Suggestion on Subjects' Requirement***

In this section, suggestion on subjects' requirement will be given to increase the sufficiency of our local real estate course in preparing students for corporate companies. Both corporate companies and the graduates have provided a lot of constructive comments for this purpose. Suggestions were made based on:-

- i. Companies feedbacks – Graduates strengths and weaknesses in contrast to corporate employment's requirements.
- ii. Graduates feedbacks – Graduates' reasons for finding course studied insufficiency.

### ***Companies Feedbacks***

Three stages of analysis is needed to be carry out here, in order to come up with the best subject suggestion from corporate companies feedbacks. There are:-

- i. Determine areas where improvement may be needed
- ii. Categorise areas according to current subject coverage
- iii. Determine action plan needed to improve skills within each category

### ***Area of Improvement***

Companies' feedbacks have given a clear picture of what are their employment requirements and what are our graduates strengths and weaknesses. By comparing these two, areas where improvements may be needed can be identified. If graduates are weak in areas where corporate employers pay serious attention to, they will certainly face difficulty getting a job from the companies. To carry out the comparison, mean scores for a skill from both requirements analysis and strengths and weaknesses analysis will be use to measure the level of contrast. If the difference between mean scores is more than 1, the skill will be group as areas needed to be further analysed. English proficiency for instance has the mean score of:

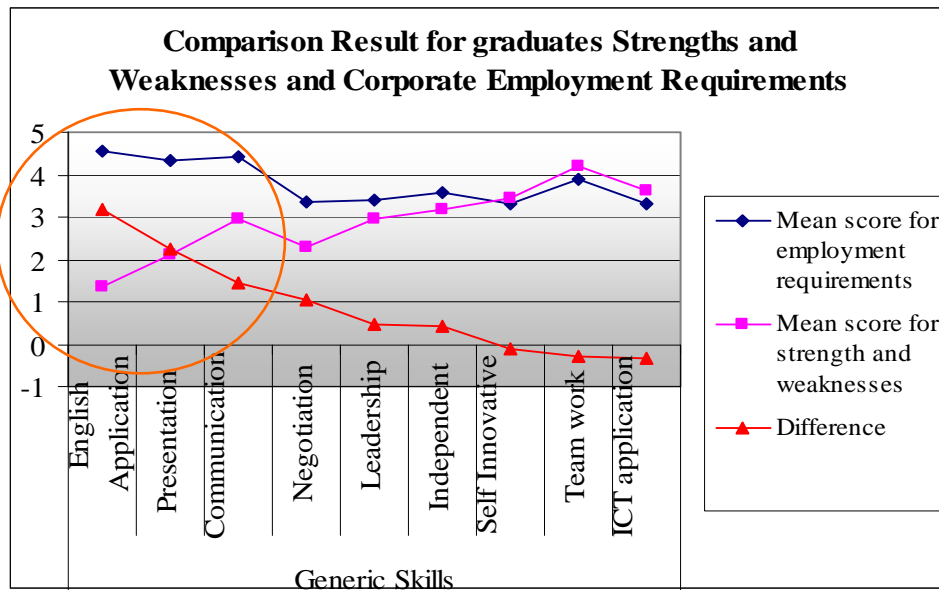
<b>Employment Requirements</b>	<b>Graduates Strengths and Weaknesses</b>	<b>Mean Scores Difference</b>
4.55	1.36	3.19

The different between both mean scores is 3.19. This means English proficiency is to be group as area to be further analysed.

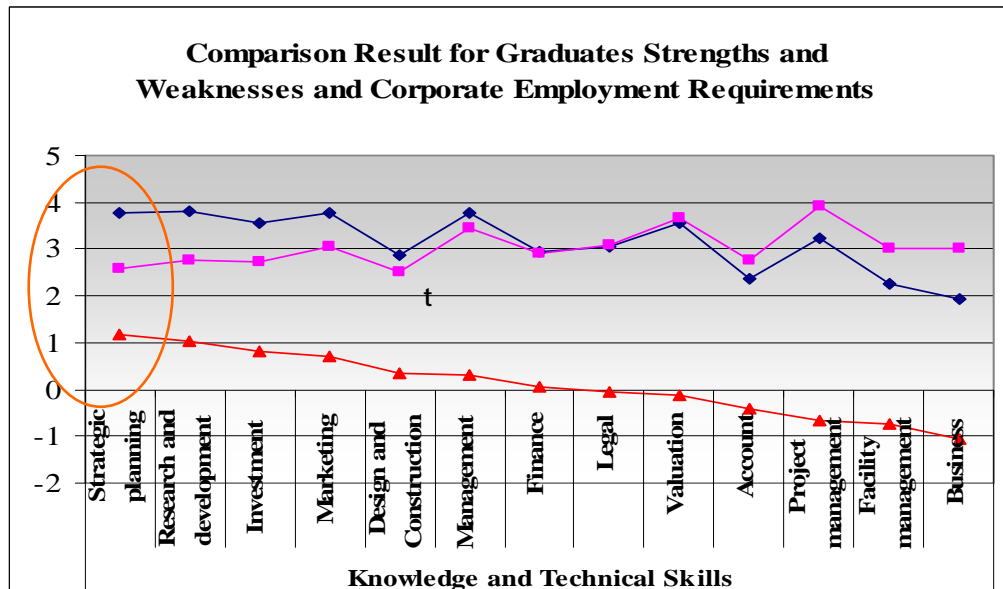
**Table 5:** Comparison between Mean Score for Corporate Employment Requirements and Graduates Strengths and Weaknesses

		Mean score for employment requirements	Mean score for strengths and weaknesses	Difference
Generic Skills	English Proficiency	4.55	1.36	3.19
	Presentation	4.32	2.09	2.23
	Communication	4.41	2.95	1.46
	Negotiation	3.36	2.30	1.06
	Leadership	3.40	2.95	0.45
	Independent	3.59	3.18	0.41
	Self Innovative	3.32	3.45	-0.13
	Team work	3.91	4.18	-0.27
	ICT application	3.32	3.64	-0.32
Knowledge and Technical Skills	Strategic planning	3.77	2.60	1.17
	Research and development	3.82	2.78	1.04
	Investment	3.55	2.73	0.82
	Marketing	3.77	3.05	0.72
	Design and Construction	2.86	2.50	0.36
	Management	3.77	3.45	0.32
	Finance	2.95	2.91	0.04
	Legal	3.05	3.09	-0.04
	Valuation	3.55	3.68	-0.13
	Account	2.36	2.77	-0.41
	Project management	3.23	3.91	-0.68
	Facility management	2.27	3.00	-0.73
	Business	1.95	3.00	-1.05

Table 5 shows the results of comparison. As for generic skills, four areas of improvements were identified. They are English proficiency, presentation, communication and negotiation skills. All four of these areas have above 1 mean scores' difference. In the other hand, for knowledge and technical skills, only two areas with mean scores difference which higher than 1 were found. They are, strategic planning and research and development. But, there will be a special case here for investment skill. So, as a conclusion, a total of 6 areas to be further studied to determine its needs for improvement.



**Figure 2:** Comparison Result for Generic Skills



**Figure 3:** Comparison Result for Knowledge and Technical Skills

Both Figure 2 and 3, give a better picture of the comparison results. Differences in mean scores are shown by the red line. Areas circled are areas with higher than 1 mean scores difference and are areas where improvement may be needed.

### **Subjects Coverage**

The second stage now, is to divide the areas identified into three different categories, which are:-

- i. Uncovered – areas not covered by current local real estate course.
- ii. Insufficient coverage – areas covered by local real estate course, but with only one related subject.
- iii. Well covered – areas well covered by current local real estate course, with more then one subjects.

Different areas may have different level of coverage in the present local real estate course. Therefore, different action of improvement may be needed. By grouping them, these areas can be address separately to achieve the best result. The level of coverage for each area will be determined through subjects' coverage as show above. University Technology Malaysia's real estate course modules as listed in Chapter three will be use as subject reference here. For example, strategic planning was not found within UTM's real estate course modules, there for it will be categorise as uncover. Table 5.12 shows three areas were identified as uncovered areas, while one as insufficient coverage and two as well covered.

**Table 6 : Areas Categorised According to Subject Coverage**

Group	Areas	Related Subjects
<b>Uncovered</b>	Strategic Planning	None
	Communication	None
	Presentation	None
<b>Insufficient Coverage</b>	Negotiation	1. Negotiation
<b>Well covered</b>	English proficiency	1. Advanced English for academic communication 2. English for academic communication
	Research and Development	1. Property Market Research 2. Quantitative techniques for real estate

### ***Actions Plan Needed to Improve Skills***

In this very last stage, each identified category will be address separately. It is a reminder here that, the suggestions given in this section is to improve the sufficiency level of our local real estate course in preparing students for corporate real estate jobs. These means that, there may be other areas of study where improvements are also needed. But they are not address here due to the fact that, it is not viewed as essential by corporate companies.

#### **i. Areas categorised as “Uncovered”**

The first category to be deal with is “uncovered”. The three areas under this category are; strategic planning; communication and presentation.

##### **(a) Strategic planning.**

Strategic planning was one of the top skills require by a corporate real estate manager. It was also chose as one of the most considered skills during real estate employment by corporate companies respondents in this research. Therefore, it is fair to state here that, to be prepared for corporate working environment strategic planning is not a luxury but a necessity.

In the last part of both corporate companies and real estate graduates questionnaires respondents were ask to determine what skills should be taught as a subject in real estate courses. The list consists of the following:

- (i) Strategic Planning
- (ii) Negotiation
- (iii) Performance measurement
- (iv) Business
- (v) Environment management
- (vi) Human Resource management

Corporate manager and real estate graduate were allowed to choose more than one answer. Table 7 shows the result of the analysis. With the frequency of 36, strategic planning earns the most agreement among respondents as one of the subject which should be studied. So together with the result of this analysis, it is strongly suggested here that, strategic planning should taught if as a subject as part of our local real estate course.

**Table 7:** Subject Which Should be included in Course of Study

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Strategic Planning	36
Human Resource	25
Negotiation	20
Business	16
Performance measurement	11
Environment management	7

### **(b) Communication Skills**

Communication skill is one of the most considered generic skills during corporate real estate employment as shown in Table 7. However, this is local graduates' weakest point as well. There is a clear gap between the two and if left unaddressed, will be one of the major hindrances for students who wish to join corporate companies. This implies that, improvements are needed in this area.

As mention before, real estate like any other types of business is about selling your product. If one fail to communicate he's or hers' ideas to others they would be able to sell. Local graduates as told by many of the corporate managers face this problem. They have difficulties to communicate effectively.

According to Callanan and McCarthy (2003), Massey University of New Zealand, have bought in a compulsory paper called Introduction to Business Communication to their real estate valuation and property management course, after finding out that, their students are very weak in written communication. After the paper has been introduced, the percentage of students found weak in this area have decline.

### **(c) Presentation skills**

Presentation skills should be treated the same way as well, since it is not better off. As shown in Table 5.13, presentation skills is again one of the most considered skills during real estate employment, and graduates second weakest



skills. This strongly suggests that, a formal form of presentation skills teaching is crucially needed.

As stated by Vandell (2003) one needs first to be literate and articulate. If there is one consistent shortcoming seen in many students entering the real estate professional world today, it is that they are ill-prepared to present themselves as professionals through the written and spoken word. They get too-little opportunity to present their work to an audience, to be forced to think logically and clearly about the way in which they can most efficiently bring out the points they wish to get across and respond to questions. They are too-infrequently critiqued today in their written essays and reports on everything from grammar and spelling, to sentence construction, organization, and "flow."

There of it is suggested that, presentation technique should be embedded in some of the core subjects. Many may think that normal class room presentation is enough in helping students improve their presentation skills, but how much attention is given to presentation technique during such presentation? And how often are students commended during such presentation regarding their presentation skills?

## **ii. Areas categorise as “Insufficient Coverage”**

There is only one area under this category which is negotiation skill. There is one subject found under this skill, which is negotiation itself but, it is an elective subject rather than a compulsory subject.

### **(a) Negotiation**

According to many of the corporate managers, the corporate world is a competitive and comprehensive battle field. In order to survive, one have to also fight for his grown, it is everyone for themselves. This means that, if you want the best deal for yourself and the company, you have to negotiate; no one will give you a better offer then you yourself. This is why they view negotiation as a very important skill to own. But, in the mean time they do not perceive it in many local graduates. Many of the graduates which they have come through do not know how to negotiate deals and offers.

In the past, negotiation was not apart of our local real estate course syllabus. It had just been introduced in 2006 and has not been undergone by any student yet till today. But, the current negotiation subject is just an elective subject. Due to its high importance, it is suggested that the subject should be taught as a compulsory subject.

## **iii. Areas categorise as “Well Covered”**

Last of all, is the third and final category, “Well Covered”. English proficiency skill is the only area considered well covered subject wise. It has two existing subjects covering it.

### **(a) Research and development**

Research and development skill is the most demanded real estate profession and most considered knowledge and technical skill. Graduates are found to be weak in performing research and development task. Students need to learn more sophisticated research technique if there were to be best in this area. Others corporate managers also question our students' ability in carrying out rigorous real estate research. This shows that, companies demand for more sophisticated research techniques to assist them in real estate decisions.

Therefore, it is suggested that:-

- i. A standard guidelines should be drawn to determine areas to be covered by each subject;
- ii. Content of subjects should be more focus and taught in-depth, apart from learning the basic many of different things, students should learn in details the important things; and
- iii. More emphasize of real estate market research and research methodology should be taught.

### **(b) English Proficiency**

English proficiency is considered well covered with two subjects covering it. However, students are still unable to perfume accordingly. In fact, it is identified as their weakest generic skills. In order to be proficient in English like any other language, constant practice is unavoidable. But, the common attitude show by most of our students is that they often try to avoid using English when ever given the chance to do so. Although it may be too late to deal effectively with these shortcomings, attempt should at least be made to provide experience in team presentations in English and detailed grading of written work.

### **Graduates Feedbacks**

The most common reasons on the insufficiency of real estate programmes given by the graduates are:-

- i. Lack of hands on training; and
- ii. Lack of "real world" skills

### **(a) Hands on Training**

According to Vandell (2003) traditional lectures are fine for providing a theoretical framework for real estate education, but they are inadequate in providing students with a sufficient real world situation in terms of their competencies for their employers. Therefore, "applied" education clearly must be integrated into the real estate undergraduates' curriculum.

This is supported by Barr and Tagg (1995) discussion on the paradigm shift from providing education to producing learning in undergraduate education. Education has often been viewed as a transfer of knowledge from teacher to student

but this does not always prepare graduates for their working life. Students graduate with a bundle of knowledge but once in the workforce they find that different skills are required. They have to be able to solve problems and work co-operatively in teams and face the challenge of changing circumstances.

Melsa (1997) have also presented a model for engineering education based on programs that are learning-based, practice orientated and demand the active involvement of the student. He notes that if a university is concerned about the educational outcomes, the focus needs to be on the real needs of the learners. For example, the teaching program in engineering at Iowa State University (ISU). ISU puts more emphasis on real industry experience and has developed formal agreements with a large number of companies. Their program also endeavours to empower the student with a motivation to learn and with the discipline of continual learning.

Hands on education may take many forms, all of which have potential applications in a real estate program. First is "mini-cases" that reflect bits and pieces of "real world" situations. These are quite appropriate for undergraduate students. Another applied educational experience includes the "real" case using a "real" site being undertaken in "real" time. This would have the potential of being perhaps the most relevant of applied educational experiences. A final means of imparting "real world" experience is through an internship or co-op experience.

According to Callanan and McCarthy (2003), in the mean of addressing students lack of practical training, Massey University Property Foundation of New Zealand have taken three different steps. First, a practicum paper was introduced. This paper allows students to receive academic credit for successfully working in an approved property business for a minimum of 450 hours over a twelve month period and presenting two work reports. Another initiative was to increase the practical content in both the second and third year Applied Valuation papers. This was achieved by having the students complete a larger number of case studies with reduced written requirements. Thirdly a "buddy" visit program was extended. The students are taken to Wellington for one day in their final year and are assigned, in groups of three or four, to property firms. The students are involved in the daily work of their buddy and gather together for a function with the Wellington property community in the evening. This has provided an excellent opportunity for students to relate the classroom theory to a practical situation.

The types of hands on training mention above can be group into two different groups; first, classroom hands on training; and second, industrial hands on training. Classroom's hands on training are such as "mini" cases and "real" cases. From the researcher's own observation and experience, it was found that Local University are doing a great job in this area. Many course work and project given to students does reflect real market situation and require them to obtain real time information. Whereas, in the case of industrial hand on training, more should be done by local universities.

Therefore, it is suggested that, apart from the existing internship, local universities can adopt some other forms of hands on education introduce above. For instance, practicum paper and "buddy" visit program can be strongly consider.

Because these kind of training not only provide student excellent opportunity to relate the classroom theory to a practical situation, it also give them the opportunity to recognise the nature of different real estate fields and potential employers. This can in the same time help promote real estate discipline to more companies. But these types of programs need cooperation form real estate firms and corporate companies in order to be carry out.

In the last part of the questionnaire for corporate companies, managers were asked whether their company are willing to support universities internship. The analysis of the results shows that 68% of them stated yes. With all of the property related companies including REITS companies agreed to do so. With this, it is seen as possible for universities to introduce more practical trainings that need the cooperation of corporate companies. But, a word of warning on such programs as a universal component of a real estate program, however: To be done right, they require high levels of overhead support and control. Otherwise the students' experiences vary widely in quality and the necessary links between the conceptual process and practice fail to be made.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The main purpose for this study is to ensure that our local real estate courses is meeting the market needs. Therefore, apart from focusing on the needs of corporate companies, future studies may focus on other source of needs which can also help improve our real estate course structure. Comparison can also be made by comparing our local real estate courses and overseas courses to identified differences and space for improvement.

Corporate companies started to realize the importance and usefulness of real estate as the company's second largest asset for supporting the financial, work environment and operational needs of an organisation. A revelation has been started in the corporate world. Although it is only at its staring point, professionals are already being demanded by corporate companies. Any one with the right skill and knowledge are welcome to take up these jobs. The question now, is whether our local real estate professionals are among those qualified for the jobs.

At the present moment, the sufficiency of the local real estate course in training students for corporate companies is considered neutral. Improvements in the course structure are still needed in order to bring up our real estate graduates qualities and make them the best person for corporate real estate jobs.

The corporate real estate revelation has open up an entire new field of real estate jobs. It is let to the real estate professionals to decide whether they want to be apart of it or not. If real estate professionals want a piece of the cake, then actions for improvement should be carried out. There should be corporation between the real estate educators and corporate companies as well.

Besides that, this research studied the sufficiency of our local real estate course in preparing students for corporate companies in general. There are no specifications in the type of corporate companies being studied. Due to that, no clear out line can be drawn from this study about the specific needs of each company type,

when there is a clear different in needs. And so, for future studies, it is recommended that, specification should be made towards type of companies. Future studies can be carried out to determine ways of improving the role of real estate in Malaysia's corporate companies. Although more and more companies are realising the importance of real estate, the revelation is just at its beginning point. During the process of preparing this research, it has been observed that many companies still do not see their property as an important asset and do not recognize the role of a real estate professional. Therefore, more studies should be carried out to reveal the importance of corporate real estate and method for introducing the real estate profession to a wider spectrum.

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