

Hobsons leverages Greater KL to expand its regional presence

Hobsons supports thousands of educational institutions worldwide to improve post-secondary and career planning, admissions and enrolment management, student success and advice for millions of students around the globe, found Greater KL to be the obvious choice when looking to establish a regional hub. Since establishing its local operations in 2011, Hobson's office has grown rapidly on a solid foundation, including a competitive cost base, high-performing infrastructure and a big pool of capable Malaysian talent.

Hobsons is a subsidiary of London-listed the Daily Mail and General Trust Plc, and headquartered in Cincinnati, US. Students, schools and universities all over the world use the company's niche products and services. Its flagship product, Naviance, is used in about 11,000 schools, mostly in the US. Another popular Hobsons product is used by higher education institutions around the world, mainly universities, to connect and communicate effectively with prospective, admitted and enrolled students.

KL IS AN IDEAL LOCATION WITH THE RIGHT TALENT FOR A GLOBAL COMPANY

A unique confluence of factors in Greater KL support Hobsons' global operations while enabling the company to expand its regional presence, says Andy Nicol, regional managing director for Asia and the Middle East.

"Our focus was to build a delivery centre for Hobsons global operations in Malaysia. Here, we support our clients around the world and started by servicing those in Australia. We are also increasingly supporting our clients in the US and in the UK," he says. The company is looking at growing its client base within the country as well as other Southeast Asian countries, the Middle East, India and China.

Nicol finds that Malaysia's strategic geographical location and time zone to be conducive as employees can easily service and support students from the Asean region as well as students from India and China that are looking to further their studies. He adds that the big pool of graduates in KL, many with international exposure and multiple language capabilities, provide a strategic advantage for Hobsons.

"Finding talent is a challenge in any country. The Klang Valley generates about 120,000 university graduates every year and this is a big pool of potential talent. We can find talent with the right skills and multiple language capabilities. It is also possible to hire Malaysians with international exposure as many have studied at foreign universities within the country or overseas," says Nicol.

These characteristics are unique to Malaysian talent. "We did not find a talent pool with these qualities in other Asean countries. Talent is an important reason why we picked Malaysia over its neighbouring countries when looking to establish our regional hub," says Nicol.

NURTURING WORLD-CLASS EMPLOYEES IN MALAYSIA

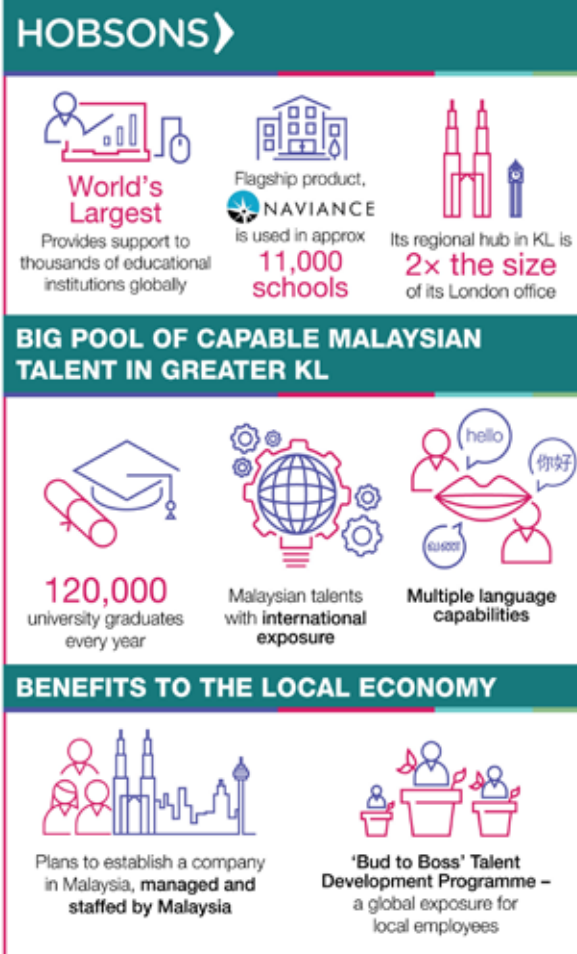
Hobson's goal is to establish a company in Malaysia that is managed and staffed by Malaysians. To achieve this vision, the company has implemented a comprehensive talent development programme that includes sending local employees to gain exposure outside the country.

"Once we find the right talent, we want to get them on board, trained and excited about their work. This is challenging but very important to the success of our business so we make it a priority to invest in our talent," says Nicol.

'Bud to Boss' is an example of Hobson's talent development programmes for mid-managers. "Emerging leaders in this programme spend time with their managers outside Malaysia. This is important to their development and their long-term career with Hobsons," says Nicol.

As specialised niche products in the global education industry require a deep understanding and appreciation of education services, Hobsons also sends senior employees with decades of experience to Malaysia to share their expertise and to develop the local team. Nicol is currently the only full-time expatriate based in Hobson's regional hub.

Malaysia's connective international transport hub and business-friendly policies support this aspect of Hobson's talent development programmes. "It is also relatively easy for us



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"We have been growing steadily and this is testimony to the quality of work achieved in Malaysia. The partnership that we have with Invest KL has been very beneficial in our growth, especially in talent sourcing, a vital aspect of our operations. They also connect us with government agencies such as TalentCorp Malaysia that runs programmes that we can leverage on," he says.

Hobsons' regional hub in Kuala Lumpur is currently twice the size of Hobson's London office and is poised to rival the size of its headquarters in the US. "It is a very exciting time for us. Our office can comfortably accommodate 170 people and there is a high possibility that we will eventually employ this number of people as Hobsons looks to play a bigger role in supporting local and regional students, as well as private universities in this region."

to obtain a six-month or one-year working visa for our foreign experts. These factors definitely support our globally-focused local operations," adds Nicol.

A STRATEGIC COST ADVANTAGE AND HIGH-PERFORMING INFRASTRUCTURE

Malaysia's competitive cost of living further enhances its value proposition to companies with a global footprint. Nicol notes that education services, much like any other service industry, is very cost competitive and says Malaysia provides Hobsons with a financial advantage.

"The lower cost of doing business allows us to offer our products and services at a competitive price. We also see greater value from our investments. For example, we are able to rent a large space in a central location at a very competitive price. Furthermore, our office is in an MSC-status building and this enables us to offer the highest international standard of service to our clients," says Nicol.

ENTERING AN AGGRESSIVE GROWTH PHASE

There are plans to recruit more employees as Hobsons continues to build its regional presence. The company had a headcount of 100 employees in early October and is looking to add 50 more employees within the next 12 months.

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