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## ASIAN BANKING SCHOOL



COVER  
STORY

## THE RIGHT STEP FORWARD

The Asian Banking School CEO is excited and optimistic on the prospects of the new banking school for the country and the region

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# THE RIGHT STEP FORWARD

The Asian Banking School CEO is excited and optimistic on the prospects of the new banking school for the country and the region

The mere mention of the name DC Gardner amongst the banking and financial circles will still definitely make many take notice in respect to the fine work it had done over the years in training, developing and enhancing talent in the sector the world over. What is even better news for us is that very name is closely linked with our local banking scene.

The government's call for enhancing the local banking industry's talent has led to Bank Negara Malaysia's (BNM) formation of the Financial Services Talent Council (FSTC), as well as the banking education transformation in the country. This paved the way for the inception of the Asian Banking School (ABS) and the appointment of Professor Colyn Gardner as its Chief Executive Officer.

Ever since returning to Malaysia after almost a one-year hiatus, Gardner has been busy at work in ABS and when we had the chance to have a chat with the seasoned banker, Business Today wasted no time in picking his brains to gain insights on his work with ABS, plans for the banking school and vision of how the banking industry in Malaysia can transform to achieve its regional financial power house aspirations.

## BACK IN MALAYSIA

Not a stranger to Malaysia, Gardner first came to our shores while he was still heading his well renowned consultancy firm. Reminiscing his time clearly, says Gardner: "It was way back when Shangri-La KL had just opened its doors in 1985 and I stayed there when I was in town to conduct the first training programme in capital markets. Kuala Lumpur was still not very developed back then, lots of greenery and not that many skyscrapers. Now, it is a different story altogether."

Fast forward to 2013, Gardner relocated to Malaysia for his tenure at the Sunway University as its Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Dean of Sunway University Business School. During his stint there, he led the Business School to greater heights with 56% growth in new students and 35% rise in overall student population within a year.

During that time, Gardner was invited by BNM to be a member of FTSC - a high level think tank charged with developing human resource talent for the emerging financial services sector in Malaysia.

However, due to family commitments, he had to return home after only one and a half years at Sunway. Not too long after though, Gardner returned to

Malaysia, embarking on a new chapter of his professional career. From founding, operating, growing and then selling off the DC Gardner Consultancy to many other illustrious roles in between, and now running ABS, Gardner welcomes the new challenge.

## EXPERIENCE SPEAKS

So what is it about the banking industry that excites Gardner and brings him to Malaysia?

Gardner went into the banking industry first as a graduate trainee at the National Westminster Bank in 1970 and quickly learnt the ropes and moved up the ranks, while also completing his professional banking examinations leading to his Associate of the Institute of Bankers (AIB) qualifications.

Not satisfied with his education status quo, Gardner went on to expand his knowledge and skills in 1974 to do his masters and doctorate studies, as he worked as a Research Assistant to the Director of Institute of European Finance and co-authored two books.

Deciding not to stay an academician, and instead choosing to use the insights he gained from his sabbatical period to return to the banking world with various

**"It's not just that the banks have changed, the customers have too; their needs have changed tremendously, even the financial instruments and products we used have transformed."**

**- Gardner**



BY VINODHANI NAIR K. AND LYDIA CHIAN  
PICTURES BY BUSINESS TODAY AND ASIAN BANKING SCHOOL





## GETTING TO KNOW THE MAN BEHIND ABS



Gardner

### On telling a funny story ...

"I once made a loan to a person who wanted to have a sex change. I thought that it was a good financial decision with minimal risks. The bank I worked for then, didn't think so."

### On his biggest mistake ...

"Selling DC Gardner and I know exactly why I made that mistake."

### On ABS ...

"... it has the potential to become a bigger business, in due course, than DC Gardner. And being located in Malaysia, it is no different than being located in any other part of the world."

### On rating local banking talent ...

"They've (Malaysians) got the talent, but not always the opportunity to develop them. Part of the ABS' responsibilities is to create opportunities to learn, and for the organisation to give them space to take the knowledge."

### On developing banking talent ...

"We attract people from the industry who join us as training consultants, and actually oftentimes they go back ... because as a banking consultant they would be building up skills, their network and contacts. I used to lose people regularly going from the DC Gardner company to banks. I really didn't mind." **BT**

stints - from working with the Chemical Bank and Bankers Trust in London, right up to the time he started his own banking consultancy company, DC Gardner Group plc in 1984.

Says Gardner: "When I first left university, I joined a bank as a graduate trainee and I have been in the industry one way or another ever since. The nice thing about banking is this whole spectrum of jobs and careers that you can have within one organisation. So, if you join as a banker and it doesn't quite work out, you can go over to the HR department."

"The bizarre thing that used to happen (in the industry) was one of the reasons I started my business. Back in the day, if you weren't very good as a banker, you would be sent to work in the training department. I always thought that was a bizarre idea...."

"I think banking is an interesting and global industry, and now it's much more global than it ever was. If you want to work overseas, there are always prospects. So, the world of banking is actually an exciting one and it needn't be one that's limited to just any one area. If you are the ambitious kind and have the potential to go places, then banks are a good place to be."

### THE WIND OF CHANGE

Seeing the international aspirations of some of the Malaysian banks that are growing rapidly, Gardner believes that ABS can help them in these areas.

"This would be fun for me!" as he adds that ABS plans to introduce a course on Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisitions for Banks in the second half of this year.

While acknowledging the dynamism of the banking field, the industry has also seen its fair share of ups and downs; always in transition, reflecting economic and business cycles. Having been in the industry for almost half a century, Gardner has seen many changes take place.

"No one would have envisaged many years ago that you would have to contemplate negative rates of interest. If I said when I had started banking 10-15 years into my career, 'Oh look I can see a time when we are going to have negative interest rates', people would have laughed and said this guy is nuts...."

"If you are in this industry, I think you've got to have the ability and flexibility to embrace change and not fight it. Sometimes that is one of the dangers of poor leadership in banking; of expecting businesses to stay the same and not change - that's never going to be the case. The best you can achieve is to anticipate the direction the change is going in," advises Gardner.

In fact, he observes that over the years, what was a relatively simple industry has morphed into an incredibly complex one today - from a simple matter of taking deposits from people and companies, to giving out loans - even the business and companies that banks are funding has changed tremendously.

"It's not just that the banks have changed, the customers have too; their needs have changed tremendously, even the financial instruments and products we used have transformed," stresses Gardner.

Some stark transformations he has seen over the years include multi-currency terminals; banking becoming more complex and segregated - first into retail banking, then investment banking, and now investment and wealth management; and a myriad of exciting emerging new areas of finance over the last few decades.

"In the last 20 to 30 years, the idea of capital market transactions has become as important to companies as to banks. In fact, many large companies see banks only for transaction purposes and transition of funds and so on. If they (companies) were to raise money, then they will go to the bond market. That's another interesting area where banks of our time has integrated - what used to be an investment banking activity - into their mainstream businesses.

"So what I was saying earlier about all these being in perpetual motion, this is now another characteristic of what's going on in the banking industry," states Gardner.

He is also first to admit that bankers are very innovative people, as they are constantly on the look out for new ways of doing things. This is why it is a very competitive business - making it difficult for consumers to differentiate one bank from another.

For many years, the only way banks would be able to gain any competitive



ABS Chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim (right) with Datuk Muhammad Ibrahim, Deputy Governor, Bank Negara Malaysia (left) who officially launched ABS on 17 August 2015

advantage is by introducing innovative products, and the industry is now trying to recruit people who are more creative in their thinking than in the past, shares the banking expert.

"Creativity and innovation is something banks need to embrace, but also with a sense of understanding the risks attached to it," opines Gardner.

### THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

You cannot deny the necessity for training from the onset for any industry, and it doesn't help that the banking and financial services sector is a highly complex one. And this is where Gardner comes in with ABS and his work with the FSTC.

As Gardner aptly puts it: "Training is an important element of development in any field of activity. If you want to be a sportsman, you don't wake up one morning and say you want to be a great tennis player and beat everyone in the world - you would need to train like crazy to get to that point."

"There should be no difference in business; you need to keep on learning and developing your skills and keeping yourself fit, not in the physical sense but in the sense of being fit for purpose with knowledge and skills. Otherwise, you and your organisation would inevitably decline."

Drawing such a parallel between sports and business is a very good one, and Gardner knows this as he has not only conducted a good many training and

development projects for quite a number of banks around the world, he has also been advisor to some on establishing training arms.

He has, under his belt, a long exhaustive list of projects that include: developing the Lloyds Bank Commercial Services Training programme; Barclays Bank Corporate Sector Project; HSBC - Advanced Corporate Finance programme for the bank's top staff; ABN-AMRO - Graduate Trainee programmes around the world; and closer to home, the Institute of Banking, Singapore and the Association of Malaysian Merchant Banks (AMMB)'s Capital Markets training.

Training needs to be organised and structured, and he believes the banking scene here could benefit from a different approach towards developing training programmes and this is what ABS is set to deliver.

"Now we spend more time discovering what the industry and our clients want, and then developing (training) programmes that they need as opposed to just providing them with a list of training courses we think they might want."

### SHAPING ABS

Having reviewed the training elements from the past, Gardner has retained what has worked best and has actively begun producing new and more up-to-date training programmes that are relevant to today's banking markets.

"This is why we have made some fundamental changes to our development

ABS' consultancy services, on the other hand, allows the banking industry access to its team of experienced talents, who are able to work together with the banks to assess their training needs and then, develop tailored learning solutions to match those needs.

process. For example, the training programmes in the past were designed for an annual calendar and delivered over the next 12 months. Now, we have decided to divide the year into two and for the first six months we will analyse which training programmes work and which doesn't and is not relevant. In the second half of the year, we will develop new programmes, while dropping some that didn't work."

He further believes that this will give the industry an opportunity to see a progression in training and to plan accordingly.

"There are three elements of training with ABS: one is traditional professional qualifications that belong to and is





The dedicated team of ABS

awarded by the AICB and we deliver the exam preparatory and tutorial classes for them. The second element is public programmes, which I call our shop window that gives people a starting point to see what we offer, and the third is our consultancy services to the industry," he explains further. (For the programmes offered by ABS, refer to the box story)

While the first element needs little discussion, the other two elements are what the banking industry should take note of. For one, the public programmes will be made available for a duration of six months and banks may opt to send their employees for it, or even choose to have ABS customise and carry out these programmes in-house for the banks.

ABS' consultancy services, on the other hand, allows the banking industry access to its team of experienced talents, who are able to work together with the banks to assess their training needs and then, develop tailored learning solutions to match those needs.

"That's a very different skill base from the past and we need to have our people work as consultants now with banks, as

opposed to just being training deliverers. The people who work with ABS now as training consultants also have to have three elements to their jobs. The first is the classroom based training (one third of their time); another one third will be keeping up-to-date with their areas of expertise, and lastly, for them to also be relationship management consultants. They need to be out in the field meeting banks, discussing what training programmes are needed, and bringing that intelligence back to the organisation for us to develop courses that match the needs of our clients," he explains further.

He could not stress enough that ABS is an independent organisation with its own mission; and as dynamic and exciting as the new ABS sounds, Gardner still feels it might take the banking school some time to communicate this message across to the industry.

Gardner concludes by saying: "There is a real difference in the way we want to position ABS going forward. We look at what the industry needs and deliver it. That is my mission." **BT**

## ABOUT ABS

Officially launched in August 2015, ABS was built upon the decades-long experience of the Institute of Bankers Malaysia (IBBM) in delivering professional qualifications and training programmes.

After the restructuring of IBBM, IBBM was renamed as the Asian Institute of Chartered Bankers (AICB) and ABS was formed as a new independent entity.

While ABS delivers professional banking education to the industry, AICB is a professional body that focuses on building memberships and cultivating high industry standards.

Created for the industry by the industry, ABS is governed by a Board of Directors that consist of senior and distinguished leaders from the industry, who represent the Association of Banks Malaysia and the Malaysian Investment Banking Association.

The Board is chaired by Tan Sri Azman Hashim, with the other directors being Donald Joshua Jaganathan, Assistant Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia; Tan Sri Dato' Sri Tay Ah Lek, Managing Director/CEO of Public Bank Berhad; Tan Sri Azlan Mohd Zainol, Chairman of RHB Bank Berhad; Datuk Abdul Farid Alias, Group President & CEO of Malayan Banking Berhad; Datuk Mohd Najib Haji Abdullah, Group Managing Director/CEO of MIDF Amanah Investment Bank Berhad; Jeffrey Chew Sun Teong, Group CEO of Paramount Corporation Berhad; Pushpa Rajadurai, Managing Director, Wholesale Banking of AmBank Group; and Steven Choy, Director of Deutsche Bank Berhad. **BT**

## ASIAN BANKING SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

The Asian Banking School (ABS) offers a modern working and learning environment with state-of-the-art facilities.

It is conveniently located in Nu Tower 2 in the new business hub of the city, Kuala Lumpur Sentral, and is only steps away from Kuala Lumpur Sentral Station, Malaysia's largest transit hub, and 5 minutes from the Monorail Station.

Setting a conducive learning environment, the school provides a wide range of programmes catered to banking professionals from all levels and areas that are categorised as follows:

### 1. PUBLIC PROGRAMMES

ABS offers industry relevant public training programmes that cover a comprehensive list of banking areas and are designed and developed in-house by their Specialist Training Consultancy Team or in collaboration with strategic learning partners that includes some of the top business schools in the world.

Programmes offered are on a six-month interval, which enable the school to review and update its course materials based on a more intelligent understanding of what banks need in this fast-changing dynamic financial services landscape.

While they are being offered for open enrolment, these programmes and more can be customised as in-house training to suit the needs of organisations.

### 2. PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

ABS offers Tutorial Classes and Exam Preparatory Classes for qualification programmes offered by AICB. These classes form an essential part of the overall study plan suggested to candidates of the exams and are held at ABS as public programmes. They are also available as in-house programmes for banks who would like to have special arrangements made for their candidates.

### 3. EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

The ABS is committed to introducing sector-leading customised and open enrolment executive education programmes to help organisations and leaders move forward. These programmes are delivered by senior industry practitioners, as well as world-renowned academics from leading business schools. They also provide the opportunity for executives to share their experiences in a structured and intellectually stimulating environment and to learn from each other. ABS's executive

education programmes are designed to be relevant, intensive and challenging, and will bring lasting benefits to participants and their organisations.

### 4. APPRENTICESHIP & GRADUATE TRAINING

ABS plays a significant role in enriching the talent pipeline for the financial services sector through the industry recognised Financial Sector Talent Enrichment Programme (FSTEP) that it manages in collaboration with BNM. This programme equips talents with the right skills and knowledge for their transition and new start into the industry through providing them with technical knowledge, as well as exposure to personal development and job apprenticeship.

At the same time, ABS also offers customised in-house graduate training programmes that are designed to shape young graduates and entry level professionals into future bankers by imparting domain expertise and developing skill sets in the field of banking and finance. It is based on the understanding that a result-driven and transformative individual working in the financial services sector will need to achieve acumen in these four domains: personal, functional, technical and leadership. **BT**

