

TOP CLASS

the edupreneurs

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Those vital early years

Early education is important in helping a child's development


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UTAR's university in a sleepy town has revved up the economy for local communities

GET THOSE KIDS TO SCHOOL

AS a parent of two, I've heard my fair share of child raising philosophies. Some have advised my wife and I to get them signed up for pre-school and music classes as soon as they can walk while others have said we need to allow children a chance to be children. The best way is probably a combination of the two.

For my first daughter, now a 16-year old, we sent her to a nursery-cum-kindergarten when she was just 6 months old because we both worked and didn't have a live-in maid. It was a tough decision but because she interacted with so many older children, she picked up social skills and started speaking at an early age.

By the time she had to go to primary school, she did not feel intimidated and if I remember correctly she was even wondering why so many of her classmates were crying during her first few weeks.

Her sister, who is 12 years younger, had a more sheltered upbringing because my family could not afford a maid and we had a support system close by as my parents were now retired. My second daughter is a bright little thing with a very happy personality but it took her longer to develop her speech and writing skills because for the first three years of her life the only teachers she had were her parents.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can now say that I was naïve to think that I could help teach my daughter just as well as a proper kindergarten. I had neither the skills nor the time or dedication to do so in a structured way, more often than not relying on an iPad and YouTube videos to teach her the alphabet and numbers, which hindered her development.

As our cover story shows, I'm not alone in being so misinformed about the value of early education. While it's not compulsory for children in Malaysia to attend kindergarten yet, it makes sense to send them as soon as possible. With the Ministry of Education raising the qualification bar to improve the standard of teaching we can now be assured of a minimum standard of competency in pre-schools, though as with everything education related, some research is recommended.

Yes, costs can be prohibitive if you're looking to get them started on international education while they're still in diapers but in this instance, it's a good investment for their future. Besides, if you start now they may be smart enough to earn scholarships to pay their way through college, which makes investing in early education all worthwhile. Otherwise, start investing in an education fund because with the way tuition fees at universities are rising, you're going to need it.

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LAYOUT & DESIGN

Senior Graphic Designer: Eunice Han
 Graphic Designer: Sujen Brahmam

SALES & MARKETING

Executive Director: Alison Lim (012) 212 3442
 Senior Managers:

Herman Lim (019) 276 4911,
 CK Wong (016) 778 4914

Robert Lee (019) 359 5165,
 Yong Wang Ching (012) 205 7928

Senior Account Managers: Ng Ching Yin, Geetha Perumal
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 Asst Manager (Circulation & Distribution):
 Sumitra Munusamy
 Prepress Asst Manager: Kuah Choon Eng
 Prepress Senior Executive: Koh Too Wan

CORPORATE

Chief Executive Officer: Hng Hung Yong

CONTACTS

Tel: 603-7968 8668 Fax: 603-7968 2200
 Advertising Enquiries: ext 186
 email: sales@hckmedia.com
 Circulation & Distribution: ext 188 & 190
 email: circulation@hckmedia.com
 Subscription: ext 188 & 193
 email: subscription@hckmedia.com

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FAISAL SHAH
 Editor, Top Class
 faisalshah@hckmedia.com

FEATURE

Addressing a mismatch in MARKET VALUE

INTI's new Bachelor of Business programme addresses disparities between employer expectations and new graduates' competency expectations

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com



(L-R) Freda Liu, Rohit Sharma, Gopi Ganesalingam, Simon Si and Jake Choy Yew Wing

PHOTOS BY MUHAMMAD HAZIM

Based on survey findings conducted by INTI International Universities and Colleges (INTI), there is a stark mismatch between employers' expectations and new-graduates' competency expectations to perform well on the job.

The findings revealed that employers see several shortfalls in new graduates' competency that were deemed as essential to excel at a job.

The biggest contrast in expectations is in digital literacy where 30% of employers had regarded it as the most essential competency needed for job performance while most graduates had rated it as the least important competency at only 4%.

INTI chief executive officer, Rohit Sharma says the nature of knowledge is always changing and in the digital age, the basic understanding of digital literacy needs to be expanded.

"This stark mismatch is worrying because digital literacy allows a person to live, learn and work in a digital society, and it must be taken seriously. If unaddressed, graduates will just continue to add onto the already dire unemployment issue in our nation."

He adds the rising concerns of unemployment in Malaysia and the increasing cost of living are the factors behind their commissioning the survey of 316 employers and new graduates so as to have a better understanding of the demands of the increasingly competitive job market.

To further deliberate on the findings and to discuss remedies that could improve the employment scene in Malaysia, Sharma hosted a panel discussion with industry partners including Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation's (MDEC) enterprise development consulting vice-president, Gopi Ganesalingam, SEEK Asia regional communications head Simon Si, and an INTI alumnus Jake Choy Yew Wing, who works as a business development consultant in Oracle.

In addressing the importance of digital literacy, Ganesalingam says that society is in a digital world and it is highly reflected in the way businesses and industries have been changing from the advent of technology.

"The biggest accommodation provider is offering more rooms than

many of the largest hotel groups in the world without owning any rooms, and the world's most popular taxi company actually owns no vehicles. These are all businesses made possible with digital technology and are those that are changing the way the respective industries offer products and services. If we do not begin educating our younger generation about the impact of digital literacy, they will be left behind," he adds.

Meanwhile, Si adds that, "We know that graduates are aspiring to become digital heroes and they are already a digitally-savvy generation. The next step here is to evolve curriculums concurrently to meet marketplace demands.

"These expectations are also two-pronged; in that employers should also embrace digital literacy and understand how it can benefit their respective organizations and businesses and subsequently harness the knowledge that new graduates already possess to meet those demands."

Another notable finding from the survey is that most graduates (29.5%) regarded communication skills as the most important differentiator while only 6.3% of employers saw it as a differentiating factor in evaluating an employee's performance. Employers are beginning to raise the benchmark with most seeing communication skills as a given attribute rather than a discerning trait.

Meanwhile Choy says that many graduates view communication skills as important because communication is the basis of daily work.

"Being good communicators also allows us to build and maintain relationships. That said, the

need for good communication skills is contextual. For example, communication skills would play a huge role in first impressions during your 45-minute interview," he adds.

To provide address the gap, INTI has launched their new Bachelor of Business programme with specific emphasis on key competencies like digital literacy, entrepreneurial mindset and communications.

At the same time, INTI has also revamped the curriculum to provide more practical exposure through role playing, simulation games, interview and presentation skills, in addition to its existing employer projects and internships.

The new Bachelor of Business includes majors in Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Human Resource Management, Business Administration and International Business.

INTI believes that the newly revamped programme will empower students with experience and insights that will give them an edge over their graduate peers — not only in landing jobs but also in establishing careers and also equipping them for lifelong learning.

Sharma adds that the gap in expectation between employers and new graduates as revealed by the survey and verified through feedback from the employers has given INTI the insight into the current needs of the job market as well as a greater understanding of our students' perspective on career building.

"As a higher learning institution, our duty is to bridge that gap by empowering our students to meet the demands of the labour market." ■

FEATURE

CULTIVATING the entrepreneurial spirit

Aizat Rahim tells us about the ongoing growth of the Malaysian start-up scene

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

In the complex social environment the world is in today, society is looking for ways to solve the problems life throws up but many are unwilling to bear risks looking for the solutions. However, with millennials joining the workforce, many are opting to become entrepreneurs as they are willing to take the risk in order to create a better world.

Whether it is an individual, or a group of people, they would often seek solutions to problems people generally face in their daily lives. And so, entrepreneurs are frequently seen as innovators or leaders who create new ideas in the hope of changing the world.

That's the big picture. On a smaller scale entrepreneurs play a huge role in any economy simply because they are the ones who have the skills and take the necessary initiatives to throw new ideas into the market and although the stakes are high, the rewards of potential economic earnings are also substantial.

Someone who knows what it's like to be an entrepreneur in Malaysia is Aizat Rahim, who has been doing it for the past eight years. He shares that initially his parents, who are both entrepreneurs too, were hesitant when he first told them about his interest to start his own business prior to his graduation.

"Despite that, I started my entrepreneurial journey while I was still a student at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM). I leveraged on my father's chocolate distribution business and set up my own company selling his chocolates to UiTM's 'koperasi' as well as at the student hostels.

"I got my first huge break during the exams and assignments period," says the 26-years-old.

He adds that his passion to be an entrepreneur grew bigger when he joined ANZ Innovyz in South Australia.

"During my days at ANZ Innovyz as an investment analyst, most of my projects were related to tech start-up investments. From there, I had the opportunity to meet many entrepreneurs who shared their excitement, enthusiasm, and passion about the things that they're building. And that is when I thought, this is it and decided that this is the space that I wanted to be in."

As with any entrepreneur, many challenges lay ahead of Aizat.

Challenges of an entrepreneur

Entrepreneurs face different challenges everyday - from sales to tech and even legal, however, Aizat says the biggest challenge being an entrepreneur is to find a work-life balance.

"As an entrepreneur, sometimes he or she will be required to go that extra mile just to keep the company afloat. And while it can be overwhelming to do everything

as soon as possible, the best mantra to keep in mind is 'one step at a time'.

"Entrepreneurs need to understand that their work never ends. There is no point in doing everything just to get burnt out and repeat the whole cycle again. In order to keep afloat and fresh, I will usually prioritise my work and take a breather once a while to realign my mind and my vision," he adds.

Aizat recently co-founded a company called Dropee which is a platform that connects brand owners (manufacturers and wholesalers) with e-retailers.

"The whole idea came about while catching up with my co-founder, Lennise Ng. What we realised was there is still lots of room for improvement in the upstream of the supply chain, especially in digitising the sourcing aspect," he shares.

Dropee is designed to introduce brand owners to a new form of sales channels while providing e-retailers sales opportunities by widening their product options. "The problem that Dropee is solving is the slowing growth and sales from offline retail outlets, plus reducing pricing arbitrage that exists across the supply chain.

"And after speaking to many other players within the industry, we confirmed that our family businesses are not the only ones struggling with this issue."

The right skills to have

Aizat has always believed that it is not the hard skills that an entrepreneur should focus on cultivating, but more of his soft skills such as patience, humility, public speaking, leadership skills, relationship building and empathy.

Without these soft skills, it will be difficult for entrepreneurs to successfully develop their business as building a business requires one to work with others.

"Of course, hard skills such as finance, management and HR are great but these skills can be picked up easily via many academic mediums out there.

"And in regards to hard skills, they can be learned. Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre (MaGIC) is a great place to learn as they host

various classes and programmes across divisions like online marketing to legal."

He adds that few hard skills such as basic cash-flow, coding and even 'business acumen' could be very helpful for entrepreneurs.

"However, I am a strong advocate that entrepreneurs are made, not born. While having the skills are great, the key to success is perseverance."

Career advice for budding entrepreneurs

With eight years of experience doing business, Aizat advises budding entrepreneurs to not rush into the industry and to look before jumping in.

"I suggest those who are interested to get into business to first work in a start-up before deciding to venture out on their own. At the same time, it is important to build value first with their customers. Many start-ups are caught up with the fundraising game and have forgotten to prioritise in building value for their customers."

He adds without any value, there will be no sales.

"And without sales, entrepreneurs will turn to their investors' funds and eventually burn the cash for acquiring new customers.

"Budding entrepreneurs must also be patient and to go with the flow. Changes often occur during the start of any entrepreneurship journey. It can be frustrating sometimes but one needs to look past that. It is also important to accept changes and be as fluid as possible."

Aizat also emphasises on the importance of finding the right co-founders before starting up a business.

"For the first three months, I would advise entrepreneurs to work on a project basis with their respective partners. The time spent together would tell whether that person is the right one or not.

"Lastly, they need to keep their optimism up as starting an enterprise is a roller coaster journey. An entrepreneur will see success and at the same time face tons of rejections. It is vital to stay positive because if an entrepreneur does not believe in himself, who else will?"

Aizat states that what motivates him every day to continue be an entrepreneur (with Dropee) is the fact he believes his team is able to create a positive impact in the trading industry.

"Whether it is a tiny or huge impact, our clients' acknowledgement and gratitude pushes us to strive better as an entrepreneur."

The start-up and entrepreneurial scene in Malaysia has been growing and a lot more opportunities will continue to emerge in the future.

"We are passing the infant stage thanks to all the start-up ecosystem enablers and players that are providing support to the industry's growth. Some of the enablers are MaGIC, Cyberview, MDEC and many others.

"So yes, despite the fact we are still at a growing stage, there are still plenty of opportunities around if you look carefully. Always remember when there is a problem, there is an opportunity," he adds. ■



Dropee co-founder
Aizat Rahim

FEATURE

Raising TEACHING standards

While most educational programmes focus on the students there are a few aimed at teachers to improve the quality of teaching

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

Mohd Ridwan Othman is a man intent on improving the quality of teaching in the region. The vice-president of Advanced Global Institute of Learning Excellence (Agile) has more than 16 years of experience in the education and educational technology industry, and thus appreciates the pedagogical and logistical challenges to engage and motivate the learners of today. As a learning designer and learning technologist, he understands the technical considerations of implementing learning tools and innovations to enhance learning and teaching. Or to put it in layman terms, it can sometimes be hard to get people to move out of their comfort zones.

Agile was set up in July 2015 with the ultimate aim to promote and cultivate excellence in teaching. Of course the priority was to do so within the Taylor's Education Group (Agile is a member of the group) but they intend to improve the quality of teaching in the educators community across Malaysia. They do this through four initiatives.

The first one is to conduct workshops for educators in the areas of teaching and learning with an emphasis on holistic education. Agile trains workshop participants in areas such as learning technology, educational leadership and professional growth. These topics are discussed at events and seminars they organise to bring educators from across Malaysia together to speak and share their experiences in their schools because their philosophy is when everybody shares everybody also learns more as a whole.

It's not just about small scale events. Their second initiative is to improve education via large scale events. They intend to organise a holistic education symposium annually, which was held for the first time in April. Over 500 participants from all over Malaysia signed up to be a part of the event and Ridwan predicts the numbers will only grow in the future.

Agile is also a partner for BETT Asia, an education summit bringing together various education sector stakeholders in Asia, which was recently held in Kuala Lumpur.

Agile's third initiative is to conduct pilot projects and implement proof of concept programmes. After attending a training course, teachers are often left with no avenue to assess the effectiveness of the new skills they learned so Agile provides support to gather feedback on their effectiveness. They'll then tweak the concepts along the way to ensure both teachers and students get the maximum benefit possible.

The final initiative for Agile is to provide services as an education consultant. This can be as simple as offering advice on how to set up a teaching space to complex consultancy work that includes devising an entire teaching competency framework for schools and colleges.

Guiding these initiative are four key values that permeate through everything they do. These are learner-centred, excellence, sustainable and scalable so everything Agile does is focussed on improving the learning experience by implementing best practices that can be implemented easily so that it can be replicated in as many learning institutions as possible.

There have been challenges of course. In his experience throughout Asia, Ridwan says that expertise in the subject matter is not an issue for teachers but changing the style of teaching from a didactic style,

where teachers stand in front of a class and lecture, to an active learning approach, where students are encourage to express their opinions and contribute to the overall learning experience, can be a difficult issue to overcome.

"In this instance, teachers need to change their role from a teacher to a facilitator, which sounds easy enough but most teachers aren't trained with such skills. This is where Agile steps in to teach educators the necessary soft skills to change their own role in the classroom," he adds.

Another challenge is in the area of learning technology. Teachers are often asked to use technology to enhance the learning experience, but many lack the knowledge to properly take advantage of the new possibilities such a move presents.

"If you ask a teacher to use a tablet as a learning device, the training he then goes through usually addresses how to use it instead of explaining when it should be used and why. The key is the possibilities of the technology, meaning the natural properties of the technology that make it easy to use in a certain environment. So for teachers, learning technology should not be the use of technology for the sake of using it but it should be deployed at the right moment and in the right setting that offers maximum benefit to the students," says Ridwan.

Ultimately, one of the keys to improving the quality of education in schools is for the administrators to adopt these new techniques and technologies and learn how best to deploy them in their classrooms. It isn't enough to just train the teachers, managers of educational institutes need to be just as knowledgeable so that they can come up with a new framework to reward and incentivise both students and teachers.

"It is vital that school leaders also understand what we're trying to achieve with their teachers so that they can redesign their own assessment standards to take into account the new approaches being taken. At the end of the day, improving the standard of education and teaching in Malaysia has to be done by the entire education eco system to be successful and hopefully, Agile will assist it in getting there in the near future," Ridwan adds. ■



Agile vice-president Mohd Ridwan Othman wants to educate the educators



Education stake holders from various sectors share their teaching best practices

COVER STORY

The importance of THOSE EARLY YEARS

Investing in early childhood education is vital to a child's future

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Early childhood education plays a vital role in a child's emotional, social and physical development because it has a direct effect on his overall development into adulthood.

That is why understanding the need to invest in young children is so crucial to maximising their potential.

Neurological research has shown that the early years plays an important role in the brain development of children as babies start to learn about the world from a very early age, starting from the pre and post-natal periods.

At the same time, the early years of human development form the basic foundation and functions of the brain. This period of development affects the next stage of growth and also the later stages as they progress to adulthood.

Hence a child's early experiences — the bonds they form with their parents and their initial learning experiences will deeply affect their future physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Optimising these early years of their lives in early childhood education is the best investment to ensure their future development and success.

Lydia Foong, who is the head of SEGi University's Faculty of Education, believes early childhood education is an important stage of a child's life as these are the most critical years for the formation of a child's brain.

"This will determine how well the development of the child's brain, other skills and neuron functions will develop in the future. Therefore, the first three years are the most important to a child's growth.

"It is also strongly supported by neuroscience research where it suggests cerebral neurons are formed during the first years of life. This means the neurons must be stimulated in order to function," she says.

Foong explains that if a parent would talk to his child often, the child will be able to pick up language development faster.

"However, if the parent rarely speaks to his child, it may take a longer time to develop because of the lack of stimulation. Also, if the child is stimulated in the wrong way, for example by watching cartoons on television, he eventually would imitate how the cartoon characters talk which would be unnatural," she adds.

That is why she is of the opinion that early childhood education is vital as children are now living in a complex and multi faceted environment.

Early childhood education in Malaysia

Foong describes early childhood education in Malaysia as essential to the development of children from birth up to six-years-old.

"Children will be given early stimulation, guidance and a range of developmental activities that allow them to explore areas of interests to be developed. And with childcare institutions booming in the country, the industry needs more people to be trained in early childhood education.

"Gone are the days when people could say as long you love children you can be a childcare provider or a pre-school teacher. This is because the essential care of the child's health, hygiene, nutrient intake and environment must be met with proper care," she adds.

Meanwhile, in the complex environment where a child is in today, there are various distractions and teaching him would be more difficult as he might easily lose interest within a short time frame.

"More often than not, we neglect the fact that parents must be in-

involved in every stage of the development of their children. Now, whenever something goes wrong, fault will be placed on the teachers or the education centres. However, research has shown the involvement of parents is vital," she says.

With such importance given onto early childhood education, parents play a pivotal role in their children's development and success in life.

"For example, children are taught to put their toys away while they are at pre-school to cultivate good habits but if these habits are not followed through at home, the effort will be wasted.

"So, it is crucial that parents continue to teach the lessons taught to their children at pre-school at home to help them grow and develop good habits," Foong says.

She adds that educators must consistently inform parents on the lessons that are taught and to continue to strengthen their partnerships with them.

Lack of awareness and lack of qualification

Meanwhile, some Malaysian parents are unaware of the importance of early childhood education.

"Many of them have taken early childhood education for granted and send their children to the nearest pre-school or kindergarten out of convenience. That being said, another problem is that most private kindergartens require only an SPM qualification to be a teacher.

"However, as of last year, the government has announced the minimum requirement for kindergarten teachers is a diploma qualification. Also, they are given up to 2020 to upgrade their qualifications," Foong shares.

She adds that there are about 20,000 individuals in the workforce who need to obtain a diploma or degree to continue working as pre-school teachers.

Government supported

The Malaysian government is aware of the importance of early childhood education and has set a target in the National Key Results Areas, to reach 97% of pre-school enrolment by 2020.

"This simply means it will be compulsory for parents to enroll their children into pre-school and the industry to produce enough qualified teachers.

"Last year, the enrolment rate was about 84%, a little short of the goal but we are confident to reach the target of 97% by 2020."

Meanwhile, the remaining 16% of children not enrolled live in very rural areas where there is no access to pre-schools within their proximity.



"Children will be given early stimulation, guidance and a range of developmental activities that allow them to explore and to encourage area of interests to be developed," Foong says.

"In urban areas, children who do not attend pre-schools are usually from families with financial issues. That said, the percentage in this category is rather low as the government has set up inexpensive and free education centres," she adds.

With such strong support in early childhood education, the government came up with a National Standard Pre-School Curriculum back in 2000.

"Prior to the implementation of National Standard Pre-school Curriculum, the lessons and teaching materials vary among the private, public and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) kindergartens.

"Following the implementation of the pre-



Foong interacting with Early Childhood Education students.

school curriculum, all kindergartens (private, public and NGOs) must adhere to it however, but for extra activities such as arts and music, it is up to the kindergarten to decide," Foong says.

Areas of learning and best delivery

The key areas of learning in the National Standard Pre-school Curriculum cover the aspects of communication, problem solving and to prepare and motivate children to learn before entering primary school.

Foong says the curriculum takes on a more holistic approach which integrates academics and soft skills.

"Through this integrated way of learning, children will be involved in projects where they will learn how to socialise with others with confidence and this would help them grow and develop other skills.

"Technical components such as language lessons (English and Malay) are among the core modules it is also compulsory for the children to have 60 minutes of lessons a week. Other technical components include science and technology, physical education, aesthetic development, humanities and social and religious values."

Physical education is where children are trained to develop their basic motor skills whereas aesthetic is about learning arts and crafts, music, drama and dance.

She adds the National Standard Pre-school Curriculum is designed to be comprehensive and holistic and is in line with the standards set in Western countries.

Best teaching delivery

In early childhood education, Developmental Appropriate Practice is used as an approach to teaching grounded in the research of how young children develop and learn, which assists in the effectiveness of delivering early education.

The framework of the practice is designed to promote a young child's learning and development process.

It also involves teachers meeting with young children by stages of development to help children to meet stimulating and attainable learning goals.

Foong explains that a three-year-old child and a six-year-old would have different learning abilities and also have different sets of needs.

"One of the delivery methods for young children is through play as it does not limit learning to aca-

demics alone. Learning through play also involves physical development where it will help a child to develop his basic motor and fine motor skills."

"And in order to educate through play, educators must prepare sufficient materials and toys as young children are always hungry to learn," she says.

She adds that many parents today are surprised on how fast their children are able to develop skills at an early stage.

"Today, you can see many young children know how to operate an iPad without their parents' supervision. This is because of their innate hunger to learn and that their cognitive, social and emotional growths are stimulated."

Guideline by MQA

Last year, The Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) implemented the first programme standards in early childhood education to be a guideline and a training standard for colleges and university to adhere to.

"This means that any universities that want to apply for a license to train early childhood educators must fulfil the criteria set by the MQA.

"It will serve as a guideline where the higher learning institutions are required to have qualified and trained staff, to provide proper facilities and have good management within the programme."

Foong adds, "As for the curriculum aspect, MQA has emphasised in the Programme Standards to ensure knowledge in child development is required as one of the key learning areas.

"To work as a childcare educator, one must understand the science behind child development and to understand what approach is appropriate for the age of the child."

Working closely with the child's family and learning child psychology are also important areas for any child educator as it will help to understand the needs and form a comprehensive learning plan for the child.

"At SEGi University, Early Childhood Education students are given the opportunity to link what they learn in the classroom into practice. They will be sent to kindergartens and have practical experience dealing with children.

"This will help them to realise what are the skills needed as an early childhood educator. It will also give them first-hand experience before they graduate and to be prepared before joining the workforce," Foong adds. ■

CAMPUS LIFE

UTAR Kampar providing excellence in education

Northern campus continues to produce highly qualified graduates

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Previously known as a mining town rich with tin reserves, Kampar now has the distinction of being a university town. This comes courtesy of Univesiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (Utar) Kampar campus which first opened its doors to students in 2007.

The campus is not only responsible for churning out hundreds of graduates yearly but has helped the economy in a once sleepy hollow to boom again, turning Kampar into a vibrant and lively population centre catering to the needs of 16,000 students.

Built on former tin mining land located in Kinta Valley, Utar Kampar is surrounded by mining ponds and limestone hills making it a rarity amongst Malaysian universities as it's flanked by such a picturesque environment.

By the people, for the people

Founded with the bedrock principle of "by the people, for the people", Utar emphasises on closing the gap between the university students and the community through social activities. Since it is situated close to the town of Kampar and its local community, Utar has reached out to them and maintained the relationship through community projects, social activities and research projects.

One of the community projects, "We Care, We Act" a new village community service programme, was implemented by the university's Department of Soft Skills Competency (DSSC), to get students involved with new village communities.

Activities such as cultural activities, health campaigns, English and IT tuition lessons, waste recycling campaigns, school safety projects, school motivation camps, family days and village beautification projects have been ongoing. To date, DSSC has successfully conducted many community service projects in approximately 100 new villages with the involvement of 8,300 students.

Community engagement is just one of the few Utar Kampar unique selling points that could attract both students and lecturers to join the university. Another unique selling point of the university is its Utar Soft Skills Development Certificate.

It is a certification system that recognises students' achievements and efforts in areas of communication, leadership, teamwork, strategic thinking, creativity and their commitment to integrity and ethical values.

The programme involves experiential learning through interactive sessions and out of classroom activities where students are engaged by experienced trainers from the public and private sectors to learn soft skills and life skills.



The petrochemical lab at Utar Kampar

Comprehensive and quality programme with international strategic partnerships

Utar offers over 110 programmes that range from Foundation Studies to PhD in fields such as Accounting, Business and Economics, Actuarial Science, Mathematics and Process Management, Agriculture and Food Science, Arts, Social Sciences and Education, Creative Industries and Design, Engineering and Built Environment, Information and Communication Technology, Life and Physical Sciences and Medicine and Health Sciences.

Every programme available at Utar has been approved by the Ministry of Higher Education and is constantly reviewed by industry advisors to meet global demands for future graduates.

Among the hundreds of courses, some have naturally been more popular among students.

One of the popular courses is the Foundation Programme by the Centre for Foundation Studies, for which about 2,500 students have enrolled as of October 2016.

The Foundation Programme is benchmarked against STPM and A-Levels and offers the shortest path for students to progress into their undergraduate studies within a year of study.

Students will benefit from its flexible course structure, as they may complete their their Foundation studies at their desired pace for up to two years.

Another popular course at Utar Kampar is

The Accounting, Business and Economic programme offered by the Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) is the biggest faculty with about 6,300 students and 209 staff. The FBF teaching staff are well experienced as they have had working experience prior to joining the university while some have earned a PhD qualification or are in the midst of obtaining their doctorate.

Also, the FBF staff regularly participate in in-house and external professional training programmes to keep up to date with the subject matter and constantly improve their teaching skills to provide the best quality of education for their students.

Another popular course at Utar Kampar is



Every programme available at Utar has been approved by the Ministry of Higher Education and is constantly reviewed by industry advisors to meet global demands for future graduates



Block A of UTAR Kampar Campus



About five species of herons and other wild birds nest at Utar Kampar's Bird Sanctuary



Plant tissue culture Lab



Utar Kampar gym

their postgraduate programme by the Faculty of Science. Many postgraduate science students are enrolling at the university because of its wide range of research and facilities.

The faculty has a close-knit web of expertise in Biological Sciences that covers a huge scope of research in one building where it promotes cross and multidisciplinary investigations and research.

In addition, Utar postgraduate students could have the opportunity for international exposure where they can be posted to Utar's partner universities abroad.

The university has signed about 200 memoranda with both local and international industry partners and universities from 25 countries to collaborate in research and development, staff and student exchanges, sharing of knowledge and industry trends and providing job opportunities.

Success and challenges

The university has achieved a lot of success and has become one of the leading Malaysian universities that provide a diverse portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with an emphasis on research and consultancy. It also became an award-winning campus after receiving the gold award in education by the Malaysian Institute of Architects back in 2013.

However, with all the success there had also been challenges.

With an increasing number of public and private higher education institutions, UTAR Kampar is faced with a lot of competition from other col-

leges and universities. Moreover, the changes in Malaysian demographics where families are having fewer children has meant we have an aging population with a decreasing number of young people.

In the face of the these challenges, Utar Kampar plans to overcome these hurdles through its 10-year Strategic Plan (2013-2022).

The plan is designed to build on the university's strength acquired over the past decade and to further concentrate on areas where the university needs to excel.

The Strategic Plan aims to steer the university towards the direction of excellence on the world stage through globalisation and diversification.

Lastly, the objectives of the Strategic Plan is to propel the university to greater heights through promoting holistic development and sustainable growth, to generate academic programmes with socio-economic and transformative impact, to foster ubiquitous learning and life-long education and to enhance diversification and internationalisation.

Facilities and extracurricular activities

Utar Kampar campus is well equipped with a vast range of facilities for students to utilise during their time there.

About 3,000 computers are available in laboratories and are installed with software that range from standard office applications to course-specific applications such as Adobe Dreamweaver, Unity, AutoCAD and many others.

Also, students have the access to a wide variety

of books and resources from the university library that has a built-up space of more than 70,000 sq feet that also provides electronic resources such as online databases, Sciencedirect, online journals and online past year examination papers.

At the same time, the university has provided a wide range of laboratories and workshops for students to have a better learning experience.

Some of the labs and workshops at Utar Kampar are the advanced characterisation laboratory, digital electronic laboratory, physiotherapy centre, sound room, media room, robotics and automation laboratory.

The university also understands the importance of sports and physical activities to helping provide a holistic experience for their students. Hence there is a sports complex on campus ground that has facilities for sports like basketball, futsal, netball, tennis, volleyball and badminton. There is also a fitness gymnasium equipped with cardiovascular, strength and resistance training equipment, a free weight area and an aerobic or dancing studio.

Besides taking part in sports, an Utar student can also be an active member of some of the 69 clubs and societies on campus. These clubs and societies are mainly divided into course-based groups; Accounting Society, Chinese Study Society and Psychology Society, and non-course based groups such as Wushu Club, Astronomy Club, Nature and Pet Lovers Society and Film Club.

Among the many societies and clubs on campus, the Wushu Club has been one of the most active clubs on campus as they had organised the "Sensation in March" event earlier in the year, which drew a crowd of over 2,400 people.

Future Plans

Looking to the future, Utar Kampar has set its sights on building a teaching hospital on campus grounds which would not only benefit Utar medical students but also provide medical services to the community. Also, the university will continue to see through its vision to be a global university of educational excellence and transformative societal impact. ■



Interior of the Tun Dr Liang Liong Sik Hall

BULLETIN BOARD


The recipients of the Putrajaya Perdana Berhad Scholarship award with PBB group managing director Datuk Rosman Abdullah (centre).

PHOTOS BY SAIFUL HIZAM

Putrajaya Perdana nurturing the young through education

Property and construction group awards 21 financially challenged students the opportunity to further their tertiary education

| Text by **KEVIN WONG** | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Putrajaya Perdana Bhd (PPB), one of Malaysia's top construction, property development and concession groups has awarded 21 financially challenged students the opportunity to further their tertiary education by offering them annual scholarships.

PPB group managing director Datuk Rosman Abdullah said PPB has always sought out high potential but financially challenged students and to provide them a pathway to further their education.

"Education for the younger generation has always been a subject matter close to our hearts as they are our future leaders.

"And when we set them on the right path, we will be encouraging and motivating them to move to greater heights," he added.

At the same time, the Annual Scholarship Programme is part of PPB's corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative to provide educational opportunities for deserving and deprived Malaysian youths to build a better future.


PPB also strongly believes that education is vital to help form intelligent opinions and critical thinking. It will also help students to express their point of view on important matters in life.

"However, it is sad to see many students who do not have a chance to pursue higher education due to financial constraints.

"We hope our contribution will support them in their studies to acquire knowledge and skills, so that they may become an exemplary leader in the future and contribute back to society," Rosman added.

The 21 scholarship recipients come from all over Malaysia and they are academically deserving of the opportunity to pursue higher education.

The students would be continuing their studies in civil and structural engineering, mechanical and electrical engineering, quantity and building surveying, building and construction management as well as business administration.

The total of RM189,000 was handed out to the students during the award ceremony. 


An Irish affair

UCSI College collaborates with National University of Ireland

STUDENTS at UCSI College have a new avenue for international studies following the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MoA) between UCSI and the National University of Ireland, better known as Maynooth University. Under the MoA, Maynooth's software engineering and electrical engineering degree programmes will be offered at UCSI with the former available as a 3+0 programme while the latter will feature a 2+2 delivery option.

UCSI College CEO and president, Associate Professor Dr Mabel Tan said the arrangements were timely as they offered an avenue for international education in the face of trying economic conditions.

"Collaboration with Maynooth results in huge savings on tuition fees and living expenses for students who want an overseas degree. Being able to pursue an entire programme in Malaysia circumvents the problem of a declining value to the local currency. At the same time, we offer students the opportunity to study in Ireland after their second year, leaving the door open for an overseas experience," she added.

Tan represented UCSI at the MoA signing ceremony while Maynooth was represented by its president, Professor Philip Nolan. Witnessing the event was Irish ambassador Eamon Hickey and UCSI Group founder and CEO, Datuk Peter Ng. 



UCSI College president, Professor Dr Mabel Tan and Maynooth University president, Professor Philip Nolan sign the MoA on behalf of their respective institutions

Giant blasts off with Rogue One: Star Wars

Hypermarkets operator GCH Retail and The Walt Disney Company Southeast Asia launch back-to-school Star Wars merchandise

| Text by **KEVIN WONG** | ecwong@hckmedia.com



IN CONJUNCTION with their 'Giant Mission Back to School' promotion, Giant Hypermarkets operator GCH Retail (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd has partnered with The Walt Disney Company Southeast Asia to launch a Star Wars merchandise range including limited edition back-to-school items.


The brand new collection is based on the upcoming film, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, the first new series within the Star Wars universe.

The merchandise includes school bags, pencil boxes, lunch boxes, water bottles, notebooks and mini Star Wars character figurines that will definitely be sought after by fans of the franchise.

At the same time, a limited edition Star Wars-themed luggage bag will be on sale along with the Death Star umbrella, tin lunch box and drawstring bag.

The items can be purchased at discounted prices with a collection of 10 stamps. Shoppers can collect the stamps by spending a minimum of RM30 at any Giant store and Caltex station in the country starting from Nov 3, 2016.

Stamps can also be accumulated by purchasing P&G products. Also, other back-to-school merchandise are available such as uniforms, sports and IT accessories and study tables in the Giant Back-to-School programme.

The promotion begins from Nov 17, 2016 at all Giant outlets. 

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DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A CEO?"
Professor Alex Frino

PHOTO BY SHARIL AMIN

Sometimes the best teachers are those with real world experience in the subject matter they teach. Professor Alex Frino is the deputy vice-chancellor (Global Strategy) and professor of Economics at the University of Wollongong, Australia. A distinguished economist with over 100 published papers, he is also an alumnus of Cambridge University and is a former Fulbright scholar.

Before he became an academic, Alex Frino was deeply involved in the world of business.

He previously held the post of chief executive officer at Capital Markets Cooperative Research Centre Limited — an A\$ 100 mil research facility funded by the Australian government in partnership with 20 major global financial corporations. He has also held positions with leading financial market organisations including the Sydney Futures Exchange, Credit Suisse and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission in the United States.

With such wide ranging experience in both the corporate and academic world, Frino is therefore uniquely positioned to talk about what it takes for students today to gear themselves up for the top job in most companies.

What is the role of a chief executive officer in a company and what are the day-to-day tasks involved?

The CEO or chief executive officer is the most important post in most companies as they are responsible for everything. They develop and execute the strategy agreed to with the board so in a traditional sense they are the real boss and the people in charge. That means everything has to run through them and at the end of the day, their own performance will be judged on how the company has performed.

What are the traits that are needed to be an effective CEO and how does one obtain them?

We actually don't know. We know some of the things that make a person a better CEO but there is

Taking CHARGE

Professor Alex Frino talks about what it takes to be a CEO

| Text by FAISAL SHAH | faisalshah@hckmedia.com

no certainty about the skills sets needed. I've been involved in some research over the years that look at the personality of a CEO and there is very little commonality aside from the fact that each needs to be a leader. People often ask whether leaders are born with the skills they have or can they be made by acquiring those skills later in life and my philosophy is that leadership requires a little bit of both. Everyone has his own personality that makes him a good and bad leader and the great CEOs understand the traits they have and use self-realisation to exploit their strengths and limit their weaknesses.

A lot of CEOs also tend to display narcissistic behaviour. A narcissist wants to be in a position of power and wants to be followed, which feeds their ego. One of the methods we use to judge the level of narcissism a person has is the number of times they use "I" instead of "We" when they give a public speech, which reflects on how much they believe in their own leadership abilities and how much they view themselves as part of a team. Interestingly, while narcissism itself isn't a bad trait to have, our research in Malaysia showed that listed companies with leaders who had less narcissistic tendencies returned better financial results than those led by people who were clearly the boss and liked to remind the world of that fact.

What are the usual misconceptions people have of being a CEO?

I suppose one of them is that they have all the answers. People often look at the leader as the one who

has all the answers to all the problems, but modern companies don't have singular leaders as they have leadership teams. Yes, the CEO leads the team but solutions arise through teamwork and discussion facilitated by someone who knows how best to draw on the expertise available, which is something good leaders exploit. But yes, one of the biggest misconceptions is that the boss has all the answers.

How does a CEO deal with the stress of running a company?

It is very stressful running a company and the great release of tension is for CEOs to surround themselves with talented people who can fulfil the goals set for the company. By doing so they can see their plans and visions come to fruition, which is an enormously rewarding experience for any person in a leadership position. So yes, while a CEO is ultimately responsible for everything in a company, by employing talented people and empowering them to make decisions and creating an environment that is conducive to work, they can reduce their stress levels and concentrate on big picture issues.

What are the steps one should take to become a CEO?

Aside from understanding and developing their own leadership abilities, those who aspire to lead companies need a combination of hard and soft skills. You cannot get away from the fact that qualifications like an MBA or CA help to demonstrate your business acumen but the ability to present confidently, to believe in your own abilities and to motivate a team are things you can't learn in text books. These skills often come through experience and self-actualisation, which is why it's such a tough job to do. But for those who can, the rewards both financially and personally can be substantial. ■

CAREERS UNUSUAL

LAUGHTER is the best medicine

Dr Jason Leong talks about how he made the transition from medicine to stand up comedy

| Text by KEVIN WONG | ecwong@hckmedia.com

Laughter is more than just about brightening up one's day. Sharing a good laugh could also improve one's wellbeing.

Laughter also draws people together in ways that trigger physical and emotional changes in the body that helps to reduce stress, anxiety, depression and strengthens the immune system while easing pain as it releases endorphins that act as a pain-killer.

At the same time doctors have found that people who laugh more and have a positive outlook on life, fight off diseases better compared with those who view life in a more negative way.

Former medical practitioner turned stand-up comedian, Dr Jason Leong, is a firm believer that laughter is the best medicine and is alleviating 'pain' through his jokes on stage.

Growing up to be a funny man

The 31-year-old who graduated from University College Dublin with a degree in medicine says that comedy has always been a part of his life while growing up as he found pleasure in making people laugh, and also labelling himself as the class clown.

"While in school, I often participated in public speaking, debates and emceeing for school events. I believe that is where stand-up comedy became an extension of my hobbies and interests," he says.

He adds that that he has always been his parents' "funny boy". During his adolescence, family members had a good laugh with the jokes Leong cracked during family parties and get-togethers.

"I would say that my parents are my first and biggest fans, but like all good Asian parents, they wanted me to complete my degree before pursuing what I love.

"Growing up, I was the typical nerd who aspired to be a doctor, but through my love for comedy sitcoms like *The Nanny*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Friends* and *Family Matters* it became one of my reasons to become a stand-up comic," he says.

Leong adds that his favourite comedians are Chris Rock, Ricky Gervais and George Carlin.

From medicine man to funny man

Since leaving his day job as a medical practitioner at Selayang Hospital two years ago to pursue his passion in stand-up comedy, Leong describes his time at the hospital as a great experience but as time went by, he realised that his passion was comedy.

"For my first three years, I performed part-time at various comedy shows around the Klang Valley such as *Time Out Comedy*, *The Kings and Queens of Comedy*, the *Malaysian Association of Chinese Comedians Show* and *Comedy Kao Kao* where I based my jokes mainly on my experience as a doctor, university life, childhood experiences, TV programmes and daily observations.

"Despite working two jobs, I was able to manage as my wife is really supportive in the things I do. There are also days when I feel sad for leaving my medical career behind but my ex-colleagues have always encouraged me to pursue my passion in lighting up lives," Leong says.

He jokes that if he could go back in time to advise his younger self, he would tell the younger Jason Leong to start comedy at an earlier stage so he could be a better comedian today.

Comedic highlights and challenges as a comedian

One of the highlights of his stage career was when Leong won the best stand up comedian award at the 7th Annual International Hong Kong Comedy Festival in 2013. He's also proud of the opportunity to be able to perform at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival in 2015.

"Also, whenever I perform at Crackhouse Comedy Club KL or perform on the road with my friends from the Malaysian Association of Chinese Comedians (MACC), it will always be one of the highlights of my career as a comedian and entertainer.

"That being said, the hardest part about being a comedian is to come up with new material and to keep my routine fresh. And the only way to combat this is to keep performing at opens mics, writing and trying out new jokes with the crowd," he says.



PHOTO BY ANWAR FAIZ

For my first three years, I performed part-time at various comedy shows around the Klang Valley such as *Time Out Comedy*, *The Kings and Queens of Comedy*, the *Malaysian Association of Chinese Comedians Show* and *Comedy Kao Kao* where I based my jokes mainly on my experience as a doctor, university life, childhood experiences, TV programmes and daily observations. ▀

— Dr Jason Leong

Also, Leong keeps himself motivated by reminding himself that if he does not perform enough gigs, he would have nothing to eat.

Leong describes the local stand-up comedy scene as slowly picking up and has become more popular among Malaysians but it's still a tough market for would-be comedians to break into.

"Laughter is like a salve and Malaysia has never been more divided, so stand-up comedy is becoming a way in which we can bring Malaysians together, and that is very important nowadays.

"Also for budding stand-up comedians and doctors, I would tell them to not listen to any one person's advice but to just go out there and do it," he adds. ▀