

Voices, Visions & Ventures

Driving change through inclusive education,
industry links and digital frontiers

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As Malaysia assumes the chair of ASEAN and ushers in the ASEAN Year of Skills 2025, the regional call is unequivocal: build a future-ready workforce, bridge skills gaps, and foster talent mobility through inclusive, cross-border collaboration.

At Wawasan Open University (WOU), we are proud to answer this call. Our ongoing initiatives and partnerships speak to a deep commitment to national and regional talent development – anchored in accessibility, relevance, and impact.

In the first quarter alone, WOU signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with TTVision Technologies, Oppstar Technology, and Clarion Malaysia. These strategic collaborations aim to upskill over 200 technical and engineering professionals, empowering them with the competencies needed to thrive in the Industry 4.0 era.

We are also expanding our impact into other critical sectors. Our partnership with the Penang Master Builders underscores our support for capacity-building in the construction industry – another vital contributor to national growth.

At the heart of these efforts is our School of Technology and Engineering Science, which continues to break new ground in delivering industry - aligned programmes. A highlight is our new TVET-focused engineering degree, which integrates work-based learning – offering mid-career learners a practical and flexible pathway to academic advancement.

Our relevance extends to logistics and supply chain management, where our Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management has been accredited by the Society of Logisticians, Malaysia. This recognition affirms the programme's academic rigour and alignment with evolving industry needs.

Thought leadership is also central to our mission. At the Empowering Education Summit 2025 hosted by the KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, I had the privilege of advocating for a more harmonised ASEAN education ecosystem. At the same forum, Professor Dr Anna Christina Abdullah, Dean of the School of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences, shared crucial insights into improving early childhood education access.

Internationally, our George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies (GIOAS) continues to serve as a hub for global engagement, having hosted a delegation of C-suite executives from China for a business exploratory tour, promoting knowledge exchange and dialogue on local opportunities.

Finally, in the spirit of nurturing holistic growth, we are proud to partner with the Southeast Asia Chamberfest to champion young musical talent – a reflection of our enduring commitment to cultural enrichment and youth development.

As ASEAN sets its sights on a skills - driven future, so too does WOU. We remain steadfast in our role as a future-focused, industry-engaged university, equipping learners and leaders across the region to thrive in a rapidly transforming world.

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MALAYSIA'S TALENT CRUNCH: A RACE AGAINST TIME

While there is progress, Malaysia faces a significant challenge in cultivating a skilled workforce to maintain its competitive edge in the global economy. The nation's impressive strides in producing STEM graduates are overshadowed by a persistent disconnect between academia and industry, compounded by an insufficient focus on effective lifelong learning frameworks.

A TALENT GAP IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

The global push for de-risking strategies and the China Plus One approach has elevated Malaysia's importance in global supply chains. Yet, compared to regional players like Singapore and Vietnam, Malaysia lags in readiness for the digital economy. Many graduates are trained in general sciences rather than high-demand fields like AI, robotics, or advanced engineering. Employers report significant gaps in job-ready skills, leading to increased costs for on-the-job training and delays in productivity.

BRIDGING THE ACADEMIA-INDUSTRY DISCONNECT

One of the root causes of Malaysia's talent gap lies in the disconnect between academia and industry. Universities often focus on academic learning leaving graduates ill-equipped for the practical demands of the workforce. Employers in high-tech sectors often cite difficulties in finding talent with expertise in automation, chip design, and cloud computing.

This skills mismatch is exacerbated by limited structured training programmes in many Malaysian organisations. Moreover, the lack of incentives for workers to upskill and the underemployment of STEM graduates in non-STEM fields further weaken the talent pipeline.

FLEXIBLE AND LIFELONG LEARNING AS A SOLUTION

Addressing the talent gap requires a more flexible and innovative approach to STEM education. Modular course designs and stackable credentials should allow students to quickly acquire in-demand skills. Industry internships should be seamlessly integrated into academic programmes, enabling students to gain real-world experience.

Malaysia can draw inspiration from the German model of vocational education, which emphasises strong industry-academia partnerships, dual-study programmes, and practical training. Adopting similar strategies can create a robust talent pipeline to fuel Malaysia's economic growth.

LEVERAGING MALAYSIA'S MICRO-CREDENTIALS FRAMEWORK

Malaysia is ahead of many countries in developing a national framework for micro-credentials. The Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) 2.0 incorporates short, stackable learning modules as formal

pathways for upskilling and reskilling. However, adoption remains limited, and many employers still undervalue micro-credentials compared to traditional degrees.

To maximise the potential of micro-credentials, Malaysia needs a unified national platform that aggregates modular courses from universities, TVET centres, and private providers to ensure accessibility and relevance. Additionally, the government must increase funding and provide tax incentives for employers.

RETAINING TALENT AND REDUCING BRAIN DRAIN

Another critical challenge is Malaysia's brain drain. Approximately 500,000 Malaysians work abroad, including many STEM professionals drawn to higher salaries and better career prospects. To retain talent, Malaysia must improve job conditions, career pathways, and salaries. Decentralising high-tech opportunities can also prevent the internal migration of skilled workers from rural areas.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Currently, many Malaysians view education as a one-time activity, and awareness for continuous skill development remains low. National campaigns can promote the value of upskilling, particularly in adapting to automation and digitalisation trends. Employers must shift their mindset to view training as an investment, offering flexible schedules and support for lifelong learning.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

Addressing Malaysia's talent gap requires coordinated efforts between the government, industry, and academia. Initiatives like the Twelfth Malaysia Plan and the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 provide a foundation, but deeper integration with industry needs is essential. Public-private partnerships can co-develop industry-specific training programmes.

The government should also incentivise employers to support workforce development through grants and tax breaks.

A CALL TO ACTION

Malaysia's talent crisis is a complex issue that demands a multifaceted approach. By prioritising STEM education, fostering strong industry-academia collaborations, and promoting flexible, lifelong learning, the nation can secure its position as a global leader in the E&E sector and beyond. The time to act is now.

This article was first published on the Free Malaysia Today portal on 12 February 2025. It has been edited for length and clarity.

◀ Prof Dr Lily Chan.

WOU PARTNERS WITH TT VISION, OPPSTAR, AND CLARION MALAYSIA TO STRENGTHEN PENANG'S SEMICONDUCTOR AND MANUFACTURING TALENT PIPELINE

WOU has signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with TT Vision Technologies Sdn Bhd, Oppstar Technology Sdn Bhd and Clarion (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd to enhance workforce development in Malaysia's semiconductor and manufacturing sector.

The MoUs, signed on 6 March 2025 at WOU's main campus in Penang, will see the University as the primary skills development partner for the three organisations, aimed at equipping 200 technical and engineering professionals with critical skills needed to excel in the Industry 4.0 era.

In her address, Prof Dr Lily Chan, Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor of WOU, emphasised the value of industry-academia collaboration in addressing the growing demand for skilled professionals.

"This partnership shows how universities and industries can work hand in hand to meet the evolving needs of the workforce," she said. "By integrating industry insights into our curriculum, we are preparing professionals to thrive in the face of rapidly advancing global challenges."

The collaboration aligns with Penang's strategic efforts to build a skilled workforce in high-tech sectors such as semiconductors, automation, and automotive electronics, in line with regional talent development programmes from the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) and the Human Resource Development Corporation (HRD Corp).

The partnership will feature Professional Certificates and micro-credentials tailored to each industry. WOU will provide TT Vision with a certification in IoT-Enabled Manufacturing Analytics, covering key areas such as IoT, data analytics, and robotics integration. The certification includes micro-credentials that can be stacked towards Mechatronics Engineering or Smart Manufacturing degrees.

With Oppstar, WOU will deliver a Professional Certification in IC Design, focused on CMOS and Mixed-Signal Circuit Design, and Digital IC Design. Participants will also earn credit hours towards WOU's Master of Science in System Design Engineering.

The collaboration with Clarion Malaysia will offer employees access to postgraduate qualifications, such as the Master of Science in Smart Manufacturing and the Master of Business Administration in Manufacturing Production & Management, equipping them with both technical and leadership skills.

Vasu Velayutha, Chief Strategy Officer of TT Vision Technologies, said, "This collaboration marks a significant step in preparing our workforce for the challenges and opportunities presented by smart manufacturing and IoT



integration. We look forward to the positive impact this initiative will have on our organisation and our employees, who will see it as a valuable pathway to career advancement."

Yeap Soon Lee, Executive Vice President of OppStar Technology remarked, "With IC design identified as a key focus under the NSS, this collaboration represents a significant step forward in strengthening Malaysia's semiconductor talent pipeline. By equipping participants with specialised IC design skills, we aim to drive innovation and enhance our competitiveness in the global semiconductor industry."

"As automotive technology evolves rapidly, having a highly skilled talent pool is crucial to staying ahead in innovation and efficiency. We're excited to partner with WOU to expand upskilling opportunities for our employees, enabling them to enhance their expertise and advance their careers through specialised postgraduate programmes," said Tan Teong Khin, Managing Director of Clarion Malaysia.

Dato' Loo Lee Lian, CEO of InvestPenang, who was the Guest of Honour at the signing ceremony, highlighted the broader impact of the initiative. "This partnership strengthens Penang's position as a hub for advanced technology and skilled talent, contributing to the state's growth and its attractiveness as a prime destination for foreign investment," she said.

WOU is actively engaging with companies across various sectors to expand upskilling initiatives and solidify Penang's reputation as a high-tech talent hub. Organisations interested in partnering with WOU are encouraged to reach out for more information.

"This partnership shows how universities and industries can work hand in hand to meet the evolving needs of the workforce"

ENGINEERING THE FUTURE: WOU OFFERS MALAYSIA'S ONLY FLEXIBLE TECHNOLOGY & ENGINEERING DEGREES

Meeting Industry Demand Through Innovation, Flexibility and Relevance

As Malaysia accelerates its transformation into a high-tech, Industry 4.0-ready economy, smart manufacturing, automation, and engineering technology have become mission-critical sectors. Yet amid this progress, a key challenge remains: is our talent pipeline evolving quickly enough to support the pace of change?

At WOU, the answer is a clear yes.

Through its School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE), WOU is redefining what it means to pursue an engineering or technology qualification in Malaysia – offering fully flexible, industry-informed degree programmes specifically designed for working adults. These programmes don't just tick boxes – they respond directly to workforce gaps, enabling learners to upskill while staying professionally active.

Malaysia's Only Fully Flexible Engineering Pathway

Unlike traditional universities, WOU is the only institution in the country to offer Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degrees via a fully Open Distance Learning (ODL) model. This mode of delivery empowers working professionals to study anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace, without compromising their jobs.

WOU's pioneering BTech programmes include:

- **BTech in Mechtronics (BTME)**
- **BTech in Electronics (BTEL)**
- **BTech in Construction Management (BTCM)**
- **BTech in Mechatronic System (BTMS)**, a TVET-focused degree integrating work based learning

The BTMS programme in particular exemplifies WOU's forward-thinking model, enabling students to apply academic concepts directly within their current workplaces. This "learn-and-apply" approach delivers immediate benefits to both the learner and the employer – from improved productivity to stronger talent retention.

Powered by Industry, Built for Relevance

What sets WOU apart isn't just flexibility – it's the industry-aligned structure of its programmes. Built through close collaboration with corporate and sector partners, WOU's curriculum is continually refined to ensure it reflects real-world demands. Every course is taught by experienced faculty who are also active industry practitioners, keeping learning grounded, current, and practical.

"At WOU, we don't teach in a vacuum – we work hand in hand with industry to shape our programmes based on emerging needs. Whether it's integrating AI modules or strengthening TVET pathways, our goal is to deliver graduates who are job-ready from day one."

◀ Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt.

– Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt, Dean, School of Technology and Engineering Science

The recently introduced Artificial Intelligence elective (TME312/03) across all BTech programmes is a prime example of this commitment. This strategic enhancement embeds future-ready skills into the core of WOU's engineering education – helping professionals stay competitive in a digitally driven economy.

A Strategic Talent Partner for Industry

WOU is more than a university – it is a strategic partner for workforce development. Its stackable micro-credentials, modular learning pathways, and industry-curated short courses are helping employers across Malaysia and Penang future-proof their teams.

For companies, this means:

- Clear, structured upskilling routes
- MQA-accredited, industry-relevant qualifications
- Better retention through employee development
- Customisable training aligned with specific business needs

While WOU's BTech degrees are not accredited by the Board of Engineers Malaysia (BEM) due to ODL restrictions, employers consistently recognise the strong practical competencies of its graduates – particularly their ability to apply learning directly to real-world challenges.

A Learner's Perspective: Real Results in Real Time

"The flexibility allowed me to upskill without stepping away from my role – and what I learned translated immediately into better outcomes at work. The balance between study and work empowered me to apply theoretical knowledge directly in the fast-paced world of mechatronics."

– *Wira Anak Nankai, 2024 BTME Graduate*

Charting the Future, Together

Looking ahead, WOU is committed to deepening its partnerships with industries seeking agile, cost-effective talent development solutions. Whether through micro-credentials, professional certificates, or corporate training, WOU is actively shaping Malaysia's workforce for the demands of smart manufacturing, AI, and digital transformation.

WOU-PMB PARTNERSHIP PAVES THE WAY FOR CONSTRUCTION PROFESSIONALS TO UPSKILL



▲ Associate Vice Chancellor, Prof Ts Dr Yap Eng Hwa, represents WOU in the signing of the MoU with PMB.

As part of its commitment to workforce upskilling and strengthening academia-industry collaboration, WOU has entered into a strategic agreement with the Penang Master Builders (PMB), offering its members opportunities to enhance their professional credentials through further education.

To mark this partnership, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between WOU and PMB during PMB's Chinese New Year celebrations in Penang on 18 February 2025. Under the MoU, PMB members and their immediate family members will enjoy a 20% tuition fee rebate for any WOU academic programme, from diploma to doctorate level.

Speaking at the event, WOU Associate Vice Chancellor, Prof Ts Dr Yap Eng Hwa, remarked, "WOU is honoured to partner with PMB, a long-standing and highly respected trade association whose members are key drivers of the construction industry—an essential pillar of Penang's economic transformation. We warmly welcome PMB to the WOU learning community and look forward to working together to expand upskilling and professional development opportunities at every career stage."

He further elaborated, "This collaboration allows members to tap into our broad spectrum of learning resources aimed at enhancing their skills and industry competitiveness. At the same time, our ongoing engagement ensures WOU's programmes remain aligned with evolving industry demands. Ultimately, this partnership supports Malaysia's economic growth by equipping professionals with relevant skills."

PMB President, Dato' Goh Teng Whoo, emphasised the need for continuous learning in the evolving construction sector. "The industry is advancing rapidly – new technologies, new building methods, new regulations. If we don't keep up, we risk falling behind. Continuous learning isn't just a good idea, it's essential."

Recognising this demand, WOU offers industry-relevant academic programmes, including the Bachelor of Technology (Honours) in Construction Management and the Master of Business Administration (Construction Management). Additionally, the university provides flexible learning pathways, from micro-credentials that can lead to full degree programmes to customised corporate training that fits busy schedules and industry needs.

Prof Yap reaffirmed WOU's mission to make quality higher education more accessible for working professionals through flexible open distance learning (ODL). "WOU is designed for those who want to upskill without putting their careers on hold. Our programmes offer the flexibility needed for professionals to gain new knowledge and qualifications at their own pace," he said.

Echoing this call to action, Dato' Goh urged PMB members to seize the upskilling opportunity, stating, "This partnership with WOU is an investment in ourselves, our skills, and our future. Explore the courses, take that leap, and invest in learning."

Beyond construction, WOU is also committed to equipping students with future-ready skills, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI). "New students can access a diverse range of AI learning courses, with the flexibility to choose from 80 courses that best align with their career paths and AI learning needs," Prof Yap noted. "Our aim is to empower adult learners with the AI expertise needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape, where AI is driving unprecedented industry transformation."

The MoU was signed by Prof Yap on behalf of WOU and Dato' Goh for PMB. The signing was witnessed by Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt, Dean of WOU's School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE), and Tan Yee Churd, PMB Deputy President.



▲ WOU and PMB exchange tokens of appreciation.

EMPOWERING YOUTH TO MASTER EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

In a collaborative effort to support youth emotional well-being, WOU engaged nearly 150 Form 3 students in an interactive "Anger Management" session, equipping them with practical strategies to channel their emotions positively. The workshop, held at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Convent Bukit Mertajam, Penang, on 7 January 2025, was facilitated by Dr Parimala Devi Dhivandram, Senior Lecturer from WOU's School of Business and Administration (SBA), alongside colleagues from the Penang Regional Centre, Ammelia Binti Sumari and Chiew Pau Lian.

Adolescent aggression has been on the rise in Malaysia, with increasing reports of violent outbursts and behavioural issues. This underscores the importance of emotional management in young people, helping them navigate their feelings and reduce aggressive tendencies. The session aimed to raise awareness of the dangers of uncontrollable anger and depression – key contributors to stress-related issues among adolescents.

A 2023 survey by the Institute for Youth Research Malaysia (IYRES) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) revealed moderate mental health risks among Malaysian youths aged 15 to 30, with an overall index rating of 71.9 from 6,000 participants.

Dr Parimala shared valuable techniques for managing disruptive emotions, while the session also featured engaging activities such as role-playing, quizzes, personality



▲ Form 3 students take part in the 'Anger Management' session organised by SBA.

tests, storytelling, student sharing, and a Q&A segment. Among these, the personality test stood out, offering students an opportunity to gain insights into their own traits and behaviours.

The school principal, Ng Lye Ying, expressed her appreciation during her closing remarks. "This talk has not only benefited our students but also provided valuable insights for the teachers. We look forward to collaborating with WOU on more awareness programmes in the future," she said.

Through initiatives like this, WOU reaffirms its commitment to promoting emotional resilience and mental health awareness, contributing to the well-being of Malaysia's youth.

WOU'S LOGISTICS DEGREE PROGRAMME EARNS INDUSTRY-BACKED ACCREDITATION FROM LogM



▲ Dr Kan Wen Huey receives the BBCL accreditation award from the Society of Logisticians, Malaysia (LogM).

WOU's Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management (BBLC) programme has officially been accredited by the Society of Logisticians, Malaysia (LogM), signifying recognition of the programme's excellence and alignment with industry standards. This endorsement highlights the BBLC programme's capacity to deliver cutting-edge logistics education, aimed at elevating the status of industry practitioners in Malaysia.

Following the BBLC programme's fulfilment of LogM's stringent professional requirements, the accreditation now enables graduates to register as Associate Logistician (ALogM) and Logistician (MLogM).

The accreditation award was conferred during the LogM Logistician Admission Ceremony 2024, held on 7 December at Auditorium A, KOMTAR, Penang. Dr Kan Wen Huey, Senior Lecturer from the School of Business and Administration (SBA), received the award on behalf of WOU from Dato' Ir Rajendran A/L P. Anthony, Mayor of Penang Island City Council, and Dato' Log Ts Chang Kah Loon, President of LogM.

The ceremony also saw the presentation of the prestigious LogM-WOU Best Student Award (2023) to BBLC graduate Log Lim Hooi Jun, recognising her outstanding academic achievements.

Reflecting on the recognition by LogM, WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor, Prof Dr Lily Chan remarked, "The professional accreditation of our BBLC programme by LogM is a significant milestone for WOU. This recognition affirms the quality and relevance of our programme in meeting the evolving needs of the logistics industry. It underscores our commitment to equipping graduates with the expertise and credentials to excel as future logisticians, contributing to Malaysia's economic growth and global trade competitiveness."

TRANSFORMING ASEAN'S SKILLS & EDUCATION FUTURE THROUGH CROSS-BORDER LEARNING & HARMONISED EDUCATION



▲ Prof Dr Lily Chan at the forefront of the Empowering Education Summit 2025.

Flexible, stackable learning that is recognised across ASEAN must become a central pillar if the region is to meet the needs of its emerging generation of learners.

Highlighting this urgent shift, Prof Dr Lily Chan, Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor of WOU, called for education systems to move beyond rigid pathways and empower young people with modular learning opportunities – qualifications they can build over time and carry across borders within ASEAN.

Prof Chan shared her insights as a panellist in the session "The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–2025: Synergies and Progress," during the Empowering Education Summit 2025 held in Penang on 21 April 2025. Organised by the KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific, the conference convened education leaders, policymakers and industry experts from across the ASEAN region.

Addressing the audience, Prof Chan emphasised that for ASEAN to achieve meaningful educational integration, systems must be designed to serve not just the "best of the best," but the broader population.

"The rest of the world is not merely the top 10% – it's about you, me, and everyone else. Education must be accessible across all layers of society," she asserted.

Drawing from WOU's leadership in open distance learning, Prof Chan highlighted how the university offers accessible pathways for working adults – many under 30 years old – to earn accredited qualifications while balancing work and family responsibilities.

She also pointed to a growing disillusionment among young people towards traditional, rigid education models.

"Young people today are no longer willing to spend three to five years in a conventional degree programme. They want smaller, stackable learning experiences that allow them to build credentials over time," Prof Chan explained.

However, she cautioned that flexibility alone is not enough. "Without regional recognition, the value of these micro-credentials and modular qualifications would remain limited. We must harmonise and standardise education across ASEAN, so that credits and skills earned in one country are recognised in another," Prof Chan stressed.

"A student studying here should be able to transfer credits easily to a university in Indonesia or Vietnam. The cross-cultural movement of students is a major advantage we should harness," she said, urging learners to view ASEAN as a dynamic destination for education and growth, rather than looking solely to the West.

Prof Chan's call for a more interconnected learning ecosystem aligned with broader discussions during the session. The panel explored disparities in access, curriculum harmonisation, and teacher training across the region, while reviewing progress under the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–2025 and initiatives under the ASEAN Year of Skills 2025.

Moderated by Datuk Seri Mohamed Iqbal Rawther, Chairman of The Economic Club of Kuala Lumpur and Deputy Chairman of KSI, the panel also featured perspectives from Prof Dr Rogayah Bt A Razak, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, UCSI University; Dr Mary Ann Harris, Executive Director of StudyPENANG; Prof Major (H) Dato' Dr Ir Ts Br Chin Yew Sin, Executive Chairman of GUC Higher Learning Centre; Associate Professor Dr Saiful Bahri Yusoff, Director, Centre for the Development of Academic Excellence, Universiti Sains Malaysia; and Mr Tan Boon Hiong, Senior Manager of Epson Malaysia.

UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN ASEAN



▲ Prof Dr Anna Christina Abdullah shares her insights in the session 'Early Childhood Education Across ASEAN: Closing the Gap'.

Equitable access to early childhood education (ECE) in ASEAN must be understood not just through the lens of infrastructure and policy, but also through the cultural, linguistic, and human factors that shape a child's learning journey.

This was the core message from Prof Dr Anna Christina Abdullah, Dean of WOU's School of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences (SEHS), as she addressed challenges related to urban-rural disparities and participation rates in pre-primary education. She shared her insights at the parallel session titled "Early Childhood Education Across ASEAN: Closing the Gap" during the Empowering Education Summit 2025.

The session, held on 21 April 2025, was moderated by Datuk Dr Chiam Heng Keng, Founding President of the Early Childhood Care & Education Council Malaysia (ECCE). Prof Anna was joined by distinguished panellists, including Assoc Prof Dr Mazlina Che Mustafa, Director, National Child Development Research Centre (NCDRC), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris; Ms Leong Mi-Chelle, Principal of SEGi University & Colleges, Penang; and Mr Jery Yeoh, Founder and Executive Director of WhyteHouse Education Group Sdn Bhd.

In her remarks, Prof Anna underscored the need for governmental provisions to support compulsory ECE policies with adequate services and infrastructure. Noting that pre-primary education has been made mandatory in ASEAN countries like Vietnam and the Philippines, she emphasised the importance of ensuring that facilities and services are accessible and well-resourced.

But physical access is only part of the equation.

Prof Anna also highlighted cultural norms and parenthood attitudes as significant barriers to accessibility.

"Many parents, especially in remote areas, do not see the value of ECE. They would rather have their children stay home and help with household chores," she explained.

Another major barrier, she noted, is language. Most official or recognised ECE centres use the national language as the medium of instruction, which can be difficult for children from ethnic minority communities across ASEAN and even in Malaysia, who may not speak it.

On the matter of quality, Prof Anna emphasised that it ultimately comes down to teacher quality.

"While academic qualifications are important, soft skills – such as being a caring and passionate educator who demonstrates genuine respect for children – are equally vital in delivering quality ECE," she added.

Prof Anna's insights reflect WOU's expanding contribution to the ECE landscape in the region. Through its Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECE), the University builds foundational competencies in line with national preschool teaching standards. Complementing this are its bachelor's and postgraduate offerings in education, which are structured to advance the professional growth of educators across different phases of their careers.

Anchored by its flexible and inclusive learning model, WOU continues to help raise the quality of early childhood education in Malaysia – one educator at a time.



▲ Prof Dr Anna Christina Abdullah with participants of the session 'Early Childhood Education Across ASEAN: Closing the Gap'.

WOUTECH'24: A CATALYST FOR INNOVATION

WOU successfully hosted WOUTech'24, a showcase of capstone projects that demonstrate tertiary students' creativity and inventiveness in technology and engineering. Held at the WOU main campus on 9 November 2024, the event brought together students, industry experts, and tech enthusiasts who engaged in a productive day of innovation, exploration, and cutting-edge advancements.

In his welcome address, Dean of STE, Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt, expressed his pride in the students' achievements, which were instrumental to the event's success. He remarked, "WOUTech'24 offers students a valuable and unique opportunity to showcase their innovative ideas and receive feedback from industry experts.

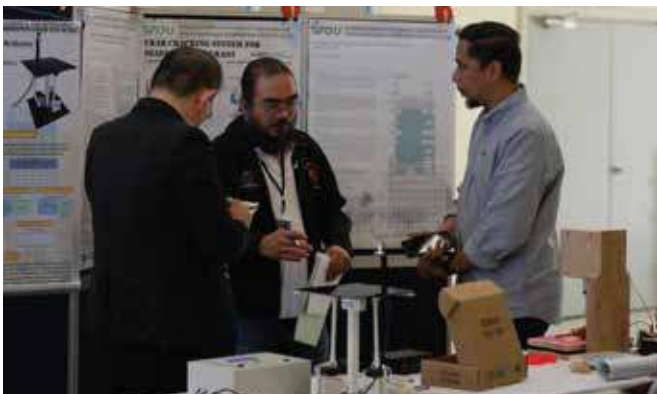
A highlight of the event was the keynote speech delivered by Curry Khoo, a prominent figure in the tech industry and co-founder of Noobs, MyKOD, and TE4P. Having started his Tech Entrepreneur journey 26 years ago during the dial-up era, Khoo emphasised the importance of innovation and the role of young engineers in driving technological advancements.

The heart of WOUTech'24 was undoubtedly the exhibition of final year projects, a display of innovation and ingenuity by students from various engineering disciplines, presented both on-site and online.

Celline Lim Jia Shyuen from INTI International College Penang was awarded the Best Presenter for her captivating presentation, while college mate, Yeap Hong Jie, received the Best Idea Innovation award for his groundbreaking concept. Muhammad Firdaus Bin Ponimin from WOU was honoured with the Best Poster award for his visually striking and informative display.

To add to the excitement, a fun-filled lucky draw sponsored by Dr Leow Cheah Wei of Lingkail Sdn Bhd was organised, much to the delight of guests.

WOU extends its sincere gratitude to all participants, judges, and sponsors for their invaluable contributions to the success of WOUTech'24. We look forward to welcoming you again for WOUTech'25, happening June this year!



▲ The judges evaluate one of the participants during the session.

WOU HOSTS TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING SESSIONS ON SUSTAINABLE HVAC SOLUTIONS



▲ Exhibitors showcase their innovations at the TAM-Carrier Coolfest Symposium.

Over 130 heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) professionals gathered at WOU's main campus on 13 and 14 November 2024 for the TAM-Carrier Coolfest Symposium and training programme. The two-day event served as a platform for technical training and knowledge exchange, focusing on sustainable HVAC solutions and advancing technical expertise with Carrier's cutting-edge technologies.

It kicked off on 13 November 2024 with an intensive hands-on training session for over 30 participants, featuring Carrier's Hourly Analysis Programme (HAP) version 6.2. Facilitated by Alan Leong, Plan & Specification Senior Manager for Carrier Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, the programme covered advanced HVAC system design using the heat balance method, offering practical strategies to optimise energy efficiency and performance.

In her opening remarks at the TAM-Carrier Coolfest Symposium on 14 November 2024, WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor, Prof Dr Lily Chan, emphasised the pivotal role of education in driving innovation and sustainability.

"This symposium highlights how innovative technologies are transforming the way we manage buildings - making them smarter, more efficient, and ultimately more sustainable. At WOU, we are proud to integrate these principles into our engineering and digital technology programmes," she remarked.

Chong Wai Yen, Carrier's Small Medium Business (SMB) Managing Director for Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, echoed Prof Chan's views, highlighting the alignment of Carrier's vision with WOU and TAM's values in education.

TAM National Vice President, Ts Alex Poo, delivered a presentation showcasing TAM's impactful contributions to advancing technical education and professional recognition.

The symposium, themed "Sustainable HVAC Lifecycle Solutions Augmented by Abound Digital Solution," featured eight expert-led talks on innovative HVAC topics. These included Carrier's 360 Lifecycle Solutions, Smart Air Handling Units (AHUs), and the Abound Digital Solution for building management. Speakers shared insights on product innovation, energy efficiency, and service modernisation, highlighting Carrier's commitment to sustainable and responsive HVAC technologies.

C-SUITE EXECUTIVES GAIN INSIGHTS INTO PENANG'S CORPORATE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



▲ Chinese C-suite executives from various sectors participate in the HKU Business School Executive Education Programme's business and cultural tour in Penang.

WOU's George Town Institute of Open Advanced Studies (GIOAS) welcomed 40 Chinese C-suite executives from diverse business sectors under the HKU Business School Executive Education Programme (HKU-ICC Programme) to Penang for an immersive business and cultural exploratory tour on 1 and 2 December 2024.

The delegation comprises chairmen, chief executives, and senior vice presidents from leading companies in China, including chairmen from four public-listed companies with a combined market cap of over RM50 billion. These delegates were on a first-hand study tour to explore investment opportunities in Penang, representing sectors from financial, IT, manufacturing, medicare, and services sectors.

The two-day programme was held at WOU's Homestead campus, a heritage mansion and legacy of Towkay Yeap Chor Ee. Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Chairman of WOU's Board of Governors, extended a warm welcome to the delegation and provided an overview of the University's mission and achievements.

Ong Siou Woon, Director of Operations of Penang Institute delivered an insightful presentation on the Penang economy, while Dato' Dr Tan Tat Wai offered a comprehensive analysis of Malaysian corporate culture and the business landscape. Esteemed representatives from China Construction Bank Berhad (Penang branch) and CGS International Securities Berhad provided an in-depth examination of the Malaysian financial system and capital market. Additionally, officials from the Securities Commission, Bursa Malaysia, Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), and the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) elaborated on listing opportunities, incentives for foreign family offices, and pathways for foreign-local joint ventures in Malaysia.

The delegation then met with YB Zairil Khir Johari, Penang State Executive Councillor for Infrastructure and Transport at Komtar, where he provided an overview of Penang's strategic advantages and its appeal as a destination for foreign investment.

The engagement session continued with presentations by representatives of leading electrical and engineering companies, UWC Berhad and Waftech Sdn Bhd, who shared insights and perspectives on investing in Penang's thriving electronics industry.

Tan Sri Andrew Sheng, Chairman of GIOAS, subsequently led the delegation on site visits to two prominent publicly listed semiconductor companies, NationGate Solution (M) Sdn Bhd and Greatech Technology Berhad, showcasing the dynamic potential of Penang's semiconductor sector.

The Chinese delegates departed with valuable insights into the diverse opportunities Penang offers, spanning its thriving semiconductor sector, robust electronics industry, and supportive investment ecosystem.

Their interactions with key industry leaders, government representatives, and academic institutions provided a comprehensive understanding of Penang's dynamic business environment and its unique blend of cultural richness and economic potential.

This successful study tour highlights the significant opportunities for collaboration between Malaysian and Chinese enterprises, paving the way for stronger economic ties and mutual growth.

WOU, through GIOAS, continues to play a pivotal role as a bridge for knowledge exchange and investment facilitation, further positioning Penang as a leading hub for global business innovation and cultural exchange.



▲ The group assembles for a photograph in front of the Homestead.

WOU OPEN DAY WRAP UP: WEEKENDS OF INNOVATION AND INSPIRATION



Over four weekends in April and early May 2025, WOU welcomed the public to its Penang Main Campus for a series of Open Day events that blended discovery, connection, and future-focused learning. Held on 12-13, 19-20, 26-27 April, and 3-4 May, the events attracted a lively mix of prospective students, working professionals, and curious visitors eager to explore WOU's unique approach to flexible education and emerging technologies.

At the heart of the Open Day was a clear mission – to provide a welcoming platform for the public to engage with WOU's academic programmes and to highlight how the university is preparing learners for a future shaped by artificial intelligence (AI). Across the four weekends, around 350 visitors took part in a variety of activities, including campus tours, personalised academic consultations, and curated workshops showcasing AI's role in business, education, and industry.

Each weekend featured a distinct AI-themed workshop conducted by WOU's academic experts. From learning how to boost online visibility through AI-driven SEO strategies, to exploring how AI is reshaping classroom teaching and enhancing industrial data processing, the sessions offered practical insights for diverse audiences. The final weekend turned the spotlight on how AI can bridge academic research and business innovation – sparking strong interest among educators and entrepreneurs alike.

Beyond the learning sessions, the Open Day also reflected WOU's vibrant campus culture. A fan favourite was the kayaking activity by the scenic waterfront – a relaxing and unique experience that allowed visitors to interact casually with WOU staff. Food trucks and complimentary coffee added to the warm and festive atmosphere, encouraging guests to linger and engage more deeply.

A key highlight was the personal approach to academic consultations, which led to meaningful conversations and heightened interest in WOU's programmes. Feedback from participants was resoundingly positive. "I learned about what is AI and it's very beneficial for me," shared Teh Xiang Hong, a workshop attendee. Elaine Ooi, who joined a session on AI in business, remarked that the sharing helped her understand how AI could effectively reach target audiences. Summing up the spirit of the event, a Marketing Officer from WOU noted, "Visitors appreciated the casual, welcoming vibe and the rare chance to mix learning with leisure activities like kayaking."

The Open Day series reaffirmed WOU's mission to deliver accessible, future-ready education while fostering a community of lifelong learners. More than just an introduction to the university's offerings, the event stood as a celebration of how education can evolve – engaging, relevant, and, true to WOU's ethos, without limits.

WELCOMING MS TOK BEE CHOO: ADVANCING WOU'S DIGITAL LEARNING FRONTIER



▲ Ms Tok Bee Choo

WOU proudly welcomes Ms Tok Bee Choo as a Senior Lecturer at the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT). With a background in software development and a Master's in Information Technology (Software Architecture) from Queensland University of Technology, Australia, she brings a strong mix of industry experience and academic insight.

Having transitioned into education in 2018, Ms Tok has conducted numerous corporate trainings in data analytics and Microsoft Excel, and holds certifications in both HRD Corp training and Quality Assurance in Higher Education. At WOU, she is excited to contribute to curriculum development in emerging areas like AI and Data Analytics, focusing on practical skills that meet real-world demands.

Her teaching philosophy embraces creativity and encourages students to explore beyond the classroom using the right AI tools. She also sees great potential in micro-credentials and AI-powered personalised learning platforms to make education more flexible and engaging.

Outside the lecture hall, Ms Tok is an avid learner herself – often found attending online workshops or out hiking and playing badminton with friends. And here's a fun fact: she once represented her school in both javelin and badminton competitions!

With her appointment, WOU continues to strengthen its vision of delivering innovative, flexible, and empowering education – and Ms Tok's arrival signals an exciting step forward in that journey.

FROM SITE TO SUCCESS: AMIRUL RIDZWAN'S JOURNEY WITH WOU



▲ Amirul (left) joins a site briefing with industry personnel during a hands-on training session.

Balancing full-time work, family responsibilities, and education is no small feat – but for Amirul Ridzwan, it was a challenge worth taking. Once immersed in construction work in Kuala Lumpur, Amirul began his academic journey with a dream to honour his late father's legacy in the industry. After earning a certificate from IKM Lumut and a diploma from KKTU Sri Gading, he made the bold decision to pursue a degree in Construction Management with WOU.

What stood out to Amirul was WOU's open and flexible learning approach, which allowed him to study while continuing to work. "The learning materials were accessible, the tutors were supportive, and I could manage my time effectively without neglecting my family or job," he shared.

Now serving as an Assistant Project Manager, Amirul applies what he learned at WOU daily – from managing documentation to communicating with stakeholders and solving on-site problems. He credits the university for boosting his confidence, improving his English, and strengthening his leadership skills.

Amirul hopes his story encourages others, especially those from vocational backgrounds, to believe in their potential. "We all have equal potential. If you put in the effort, believe in yourself, and keep moving forward, nothing is impossible."

BEATING THE ODDS, WOU PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATE INSPIRES HOPE THROUGH HIS JOURNEY



▲ Quinston Kueh during one of his talks.

A passion to help others understand and overcome life's emotional and mental battles motivated Quinston Kueh Meng Liang to pursue a psychology degree. But what makes his story truly remarkable is the strength and resilience it took to reach that goal.

Diagnosed with Becker Muscular Dystrophy at the age of 13, Quinston has lived with the progressive disorder that affects muscle strength and mobility. Now 27, he is set to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Psychology (BAPS) from WOU, after eight years of discipline, personal growth, and unwavering determination.

"I was drawn to psychology because it aligns with my calling to help others. Through psychology, I am better equipped to walk alongside others in their struggles – emotionally, mentally, and spiritually."

Quinston enrolled at WOU in 2017, attracted by the uniqueness of its open distance learning (ODL) model.

"Living with muscular dystrophy brings daily challenges – limited mobility, physical fatigue, and sometimes emotional lows. I chose WOU because of its flexible learning structure, which is essential for someone like me," he explained.

Looking back on his WOU journey, Quinston described his experience as a blessing.

"The flexibility and support from the faculty have allowed me to pursue higher education without compromising my health."

Based in Kuching, Sarawak, he is currently completing a three-month internship at 20dB Therapy Tree, a local wellness centre, where he is gaining valuable hands-on experience. He hopes to specialise in counselling, with a focus on emotional resilience, trauma recovery, and spiritual well-being.

Alongside his budding career in psychology, Quinston has grown as a motivational speaker, particularly in schools. He gave his first talk in 2018 and has since continued using his voice to uplift others.

"I plan to continue using my platform as a speaker to reach young people, especially those facing personal battles, helping them find healing and identity through both psychological tools and faith."

He hopes to merge his knowledge in psychology with his speaking ministry – not just to encourage, but to inspire lasting hope.

In the long term, Quinston envisions a career that blends clinical expertise with purpose-driven outreach – particularly in mental health awareness, youth empowerment, and disability advocacy. He is especially passionate about making psychology more relatable and accessible, especially for individuals who feel unseen or discouraged due to their circumstances.

The eldest of three siblings, Quinston credits his Christian faith and the unwavering support of his family for helping him stay the course. After a long and meaningful journey, he now looks forward to celebrating his Convocation this November at WOU's main campus in Penang.

To others facing physical limitations or personal struggles while pursuing their education, Quinston offers this heartfelt encouragement:

"Education may be tough, but with determination, faith, and the right support, it is absolutely possible."

With WOU's personalised and inclusive learning model – offering flexible scheduling and an interactive self-learning portal—Quinston was able to pursue his studies at his own pace. The University remains committed to helping more learners like him realise their aspirations, because no one should be left behind in the pursuit of education.



▲ Quinston Kueh shares his learning journey, despite the challenges posed by his illness.

FROM NUMBERS TO IMPACT: HOW A WOU ACCOUNTING GRADUATE BUILT A LIFE-CHANGING FITNESS BRAND



▲ Robin Cheah credits WOU for providing the knowledge that helped him build his own business.

Robin Cheah never imagined that pursuing an accounting degree would one day spark the creation of Sifu Fit – a thriving personal training brand that’s transforming lives across Penang.

Graduating in 2017 with a Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Accounting (BBAC) from WOU, Robin began his career in marketing and finance administration. But it wasn’t long before he uncovered a deeper calling – fitness training – which led him to earn his credentials as a HRDF (Human Resource Development Fund) Accredited Trainer.

In 2020, he took the leap. Combining his passion for health and wellness with the business acumen gained from his WOU degree, Robin founded Sifu Fit. Two years later, he proudly opened the doors to his very own fitness studio in George Town.

“I chose WOU because the programme was affordable, flexible and incredibly practical,” said Robin, who grew up in Penang. “As a self-employed trainer and entrepreneur, you need to know how to manage your finances – from income and expenses to cash flow and profit growth.”

Today at 32, Robin trains a wide-ranging clientele, including children, senior citizens, and individuals with special needs. He credits WOU with giving him the foundation to build a business that’s not only sustainable, but also meaningful.

“One of the biggest takeaways from my accounting degree was learning how to manage cash flow and minimise unnecessary costs. That clarity helped me structure my business to be lean and efficient – especially during campaigns and events where spending can easily spiral.”

But it wasn’t just the course content that made a difference.

“The lecturers at WOU went beyond the textbook. They brought in real-life insights from their own experiences, which gave me a clearer picture of the business world. It

helped me avoid common mistakes and make smarter decisions early on.”

Robin’s time at WOU also helped him grow as a leader. As a former Student Council President, he actively volunteered at university events, honing his soft skills and expanding his network.

“Organising and participating in events taught me how to communicate better, solve problems, and build lasting relationships. These are the skills that have carried me through my entrepreneurial journey.”

Today, Robin is recognised as one of Penang’s leading personal trainers. His certifications span high-intensity interval training (HIIT), Muay Thai kickboxing, weightlifting fundamentals, and advanced credentials from Australia Strength Performance (ASP) in areas like nutrition, hypertrophy, strength training, and physique transformation. A strong believer in lifelong learning, Robin urges other working adults to take the plunge into further education.

“Education gives you the foundation to grow – not just in knowledge, but in mindset. A degree is more than a certificate. It teaches discipline, focus, and the ability to turn ideas into action.”

He added, “Learning never stops. It happens every day – at work, through people, in the smallest moments. Every bit of effort you put in builds up. And one day, that effort could change your life.”

Robin’s inspiring journey is a powerful example of how WOU’s business-focused programmes equip aspiring entrepreneurs with the practical tools to succeed in a fast-evolving, competitive world. Through degrees like the BBAC and other offerings from the School of Business & Administration, students don’t just graduate with knowledge – they graduate with purpose.



▲ Robin Cheah conducts a training session with his client at the gym.

TURNING PENANG INTO GLOBAL HUB FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC EDUCATION



▲ Participants and organiser of the inaugural Chamberfest, at the grand finale held at WOU's Homestead.

WOU is proud to have played a meaningful role in nurturing young musical talent and enriching Penang's arts scene through its collaboration with the Southeast Asia Chamberfest 2024, held from 17 to 21 December 2024.

As part of this initiative, WOU sponsored two young musicians and hosted the festival's grand finale at its iconic Homestead building. This aligns with WOU's Culture Pillar, reinforcing the University's dedication to holistic education and creative community-building.

To formalise this cultural collaboration, WOU also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Chamberfest, underscoring its commitment to quality music education and Penang's growth as a classical music hub.

"WOU is dedicated to promoting holistic development and growth, and this partnership with Chamberfest perfectly complements our mission of nurturing well-rounded and talented individuals," said Prof Dr Anna Christina Abdullah, Dean of the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (SEHS), who represented WOU at the signing.

The inaugural Chamberfest gathered 26 outstanding musicians aged 10 to 21 from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei for four days of intensive workshops at the scenic BHL Bungalow on Penang Hill. The festival was founded by Prof Chan Tze Law, Vice Dean of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore, with the goal of offering young people deeper meaning through music and cultural exchange.

The festival concluded with a two-part grand finale at WOU's Homestead. The first half featured chamber ensemble performances, while the second highlighted Vivaldi's violin concertos performed by nine talented soloists.

The success of this inaugural Chamberfest signals a promising future for the festival – and with WOU's continued support, Penang is well on its way to becoming a key regional centre for classical music and the creative arts.

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