

# REVITALISING INNER CITY GEORGE TOWN

Launch

Wawasan Open University's exciting smart collaboration at Penang's all-new Creative Digital District (CD<sup>2</sup>) is expected to help usher a new generation of learners equipped for the technological era, and build a thriving hub of digital creativity.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

As Malaysia and the world begin to rise again following a series of fruitful measures in the first quarter of 2022 to curtail the long-drawn pandemic, we have also seen a slew of new opportunities for our students to excel in the academic sphere. WOU has been blessed with an assortment of new achievements and initiatives in areas such as industrial partnerships, financial assistance, innovation, volunteerism and professional recognition.

The University is especially excited about the recent launch of the Creative Digital District in George Town, abridged as CD<sup>2</sup> @ George Town. Hopefully, this is the start of a beautiful and productive relationship between the state government, universities and industries to positively impact the economy and the future workforce.

We look forward to collaborative efforts, through the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT), to build a thriving digital hub that will act as a key driver of the state's digital economy. The strategic location of DiGiT within the heritage enclave will serve as a win-win situation for WOU's digital business and software engineering students. They can garner knowledge and expertise from the tech companies operating there, and also contribute their talents to industry and society.

We are ever grateful to the LYL Foundation for its provision of scholarships to DiGiT students in their first year of study as they receive intensive, skills-centric learning at WOU. The students undergo paid apprenticeship with industry partners from the second year onwards, and hence graduate with three years of working experience.

WOU programmes also offer an accelerated pathway for students to gain professional certifications. For example, the accounting graduates can obtain CIMA qualifications, while construction management graduates can become a professional technologist, a chartered construction manager, and so forth.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, the University organises webinars and short-term courses to motivate the community as well as boost the capabilities of the workforce.

We want to also acknowledge and thank students who participated in volunteer work outside of the University, including those who joined the flood relief and food distribution efforts in the wake of the massive flooding in Klang Valley last December.

As we progress into the year, let us look to the future with hope and always give our best, for the good of our individual selves and the public.

**Chief Editor:** Professor Lily Chan (*Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor*)

**Editorial Team:** Agnes James, Rasidah Mion, Selvarani Suppiah, Natasha Goh Wen Yi

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# WOU'S BURSARY AWARD: A GODSEND OPPORTUNITY IN TRYING TIMES

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen many students putting their dreams of advancing their formal learning on the backburner. For those whose educational pursuits have been hampered by financial restrictions during this period, the WOU-LYL Bursary Award for On-Campus Learning (OCL) at the University comes as a lifeline.

Three recipients from Penang who received full scholarships under the award scheme share how the aid has given them a vital helping hand, keeping their academic aspirations alive.

## KEEN TO HELP PEOPLE COPE WITH STRESS



**Yin Yue Feng's** mind was set on becoming a clinical psychologist. It led her to enrol in the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Psychology (BAPS) programme during the January 2021 intake.

She feels that the degree would give her the perfect foundation for her plans to subsequently take up a

Master's in Clinical Psychology on a part-time basis. She aims to work as a licensed counsellor, supporting those with mental health issues.

"I am interested in psychology because I want to learn about human behaviour, the conscious mind and people's personality," said Yin, who already holds a Diploma in Hospitality Management.

The 24-year-old is grateful for the timely scholarship as her family's income was affected by the pandemic. Her father, the main breadwinner, works as a hawker. "I am now able to focus on my studies without worrying about my tuition fees," she said. "This has reduced my stress. The scholarship motivates me to work hard to achieve my ambition and help others."

She added that the programme enables her to better understand people, and make proper judgments and decisions. "The knowledge and skills I acquire will be useful in my daily life and I can also apply them to my profession as I help people manage their problems and emotional distress," she explained.

## ENVISIONING TO SCALE THE STEEP LOGISTICS LADDER



**Eng An Qi**, 23, aspires to become a logistics executive in an international logistics company. "I want to gain knowledge and lots of experience in the field of logistics, so that I can rise up the ranks in my career and contribute to industry," said the determined lass.

Holding a Diploma in Logistics Management, she enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Logistics and Supply Chain Management (BBLC) programme during the May 2021 intake. Eng is thankful for the scholarship as her parents are retired teachers. It helps her to focus on her studies, freeing her from the time-consuming rigours of working extra hours at her part-time job.

"Receiving the full scholarship means a lot because it reduces my family's financial burden. It also motivates me to maintain a high level of academic performance," she shared.

## ON THE RUNWAY TO HER OWN FASHION BUSINESS



**Samantha Cheah Yee Chern** has deep-seated hopes of succeeding as a clothing business entrepreneur, to the extent of even some day creating her own brand.

In an attempt to acquire much-needed knowledge to realise her goals, the 22-year-old enrolled in the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management (BBMG) programme during the September 2021 intake. She holds a Diploma in Business Administration.

Her father is a gardener, and her mum runs a small fashion business. Her younger sister is in secondary school. Cheah is thankful to WOU for the opportunity to pursue tertiary qualification so that she can give "my parents a good life and possess my own brand". The scholarship award has greatly encouraged her, as it serves to allay her family's financial woes.

She now also has more time and energy to focus on her studies without the need for any part-time work. "I am determined to maintain my CGPA for the scholarship, and enhance my capabilities and knowledge through the programme," she said.



# QUEST FOR SUSTAINABILITY: ONUS ON CONSUMERS TO PRACTISE RESPONSIBLE BUYING AND CONSUMPTION

Much has been said about the authorities' responsibility in steering Malaysia to fulfil the United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to protect the planet and uplift society. However, individual citizens must also play a critical role in helping the country achieve the goals, especially the twelfth SDG – on responsible consumption and production.

School of Business & Administration (SBA) Dean Prakash V Arumugam said that responsible consumption covers environmental, economic, social and health dimensions, and depends on the sensitivity of consumers. "For instance, environmentally conscious people will only buy products created in an environment-friendly process and the health-conscious ones will only purchase products not detrimental to health," he said.

He asserted that the ideals of "people, planet and profit" must complement each other to achieve sustainable development. Businesses should not only focus on profits, but also care for employees, society and the planet.

Prakash was speaking at a recent online talk on *Responsible Consumption: Sustainable Development Goals & You*, organised by SBA and the Ipoh Regional Centre.

He noted statistics that 1.3 billion tonnes of food are wasted every year, and the food sector accounts for around 22% of total greenhouse gas emissions, largely from the conversion of forests into farmlands.

Globally, two billion people are overweight or obese, and only 3% of the world's water is drinkable. There are five trillion single-use plastic bags thrown away each year, while 7.3kg of electronic wastes (e.g. batteries) are generated by each person, of which only 1.7kg is recycled.

Prakash cited five particular ways to become a responsible consumer. "First, buy only green products," he said, describing these as commodities with low impact on the environment. They include organic products with low carbon footprint and others that do not contribute to pollution or depletion of natural resources. "Buy from businesses that respect the environment," he stressed.

Secondly, patronise companies that respect social laws and consider the impact of their products on societies. "Buy products that are made without forced child labour, with good working conditions that respect working hours and fair wages, and are manufactured in compliance with ethical standards, including corruption. Buy goods made in cooperation with local communities, respecting their lifestyles and business profit."



◀ Prakash advocates responsible buying and consumption.

Third is consuming "healthier" products based on nutritional composition and hygiene standards, with no harmful chemical content. Next is consumption of products with a positive impact on the economy. These include locally-made products or those manufactured by plants that create more jobs.

Fifth, consume products that are manufactured while respecting certain ethical or moral principles, like animal welfare, fairness (e.g. pricing of products) and individual freedoms.

Prakash said responsible buying and consumption require consumers to gather information – by reading the CSR activities of companies, corporate websites and product labels – to ensure that the manufacturers have a responsible production process.

He also urged consumers to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, like harvesting rainwater for irrigation or floor washing, minimising waste generation at home, walking or bicycling instead of driving to work, reusing, buying energy-saving electronic goods, and using solar water heaters.

He however cautioned against greenwashing – an over-emphasis on buying green products – as that too generates waste. For example, the reusable water bottle market is expected to reach US\$10.4 billion by 2025.

WOU offers an elective course on 'Business for Sustainable Development' under the Commonwealth Executive MBA (CeMBA) programme, designed for those seeking management-level positions.

# PIONEER BUSINESS DIPLOMA GRADUATES REVVED UP FOR THE FUTURE

The Diploma in Business Management (DBMG) programme conducted via on-campus learning (OCL) sees a significant milestone with the emergence of its pioneer graduates this year. Three of them wrapped up their studies at the main campus in Penang at the end of last year, after having enrolled in March 2019.

While awaiting the formal convocation ceremony, all three already joined the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Management (BBMG) programme, also on OCL mode, which began in January 2022. The students, who are a special part of the diploma programme's success, share their motivations, aspirations and plans for the future.

## GAINING A WORLD OF EXPERIENCES FOR A PROMISING NEW CAREER



Among the major benefits **Nur Syaza Erina Muhammad Rafif**, 21, gained from the diploma programme was a three-month industrial training arrangement. The experience she underwent in the HR division of a freight forwarding company proved to be precious. She got to learn important soft skills like collaboration, teamwork

and maintaining work discipline there.

"WOU has given me a lot of opportunities to show what I'm capable of and to experience a university life," she asserted, while looking forward to a promising career in human resources and the possibility of starting her own business. She learnt, among other things, how to manage the financial aspects of a business and how to manage people.

Nur Syaza Erina explained that her auntie had recommended WOU to her upon hearing about the new diploma programme and looking into the fees. Her interest was especially piqued by the idyllic seaside campus as it offers a pleasant ambience conducive to learning.

She believes the degree will improve her job and career prospects. "Starting my own business would be great. Otherwise, I don't mind taking any post relating to business, particularly in a HR department," she said.

## DIPLOMA SUCCESS OPENS PATH TOWARDS POSTGRADUATE LEARNING

**Clarissa Koh Hui Hsing** sees her successful completion of the diploma programme as heralding a journey towards



a fulfilling postgraduate education, having already enrolled in the management degree (BBMG) programme.

"I plan to do my postgraduate studies after completing my degree," she shared. Eyeing a career in business and investments, she aims to acquire the needed skills to realise this aspiration. "I hope to one day become a professional investment broker and part-time educator."

"WOU was the logical choice for me because of the reasonable cost and it is located close to home," added the 23-year-old Penangite. She is encouraged that she managed to develop critical thinking and analytical skills through the various diploma assignments that she undertook.

Further to that, her industrial training with an international precision engineering solutions provider in Bayan Lepas certainly gave her an impressive foundation. It exposed her to dealing with a multinational client base, imbibing in her helpful problem-solving and communications skills.

## TOSS BETWEEN INHERITING A BUSINESS AND JOINING THE BANKING SECTOR



**Ang Hui Chin**, 22, is going with the flow, letting her life journey and work experiences influence whether she should take over her uncle's business or follow her yearning for a career in banking.

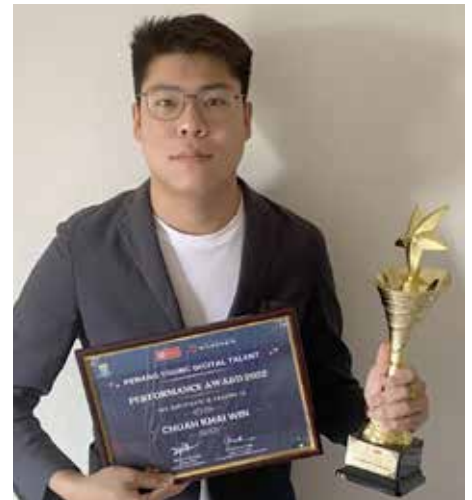
Her uncle runs a business in Penang selling CCTV and other electronic hardware. He was the one who encouraged Ang to take up business studies at WOU. She is determined to complete her degree and gain relevant work experience on managing a business before deciding between her uncle's offer and entering the banking industry.

During her diploma internship at a financial consultant firm, she was tasked with organising customer information, video editing and doing telemarketing calls.

On her future plans, Ang harbours an ambition to work in a bank once she graduates with her bachelor's degree. She has three cousins working in banks, who have shared with her about the excellent work environment and benefits there.



▲ Chuah receiving his award from the Penang Chief Minister.



▲ Chuah with trophy and certificate.

## WOU MANAGEMENT STUDENT EXCELS IN DIGITAL COMPETITION

When business management student Chuah Khai Win entered a grand competition organised by the Penang Youth Development Corporation (PYDC) recently, he did not anticipate becoming a winner. As though that was not enough, he also got the opportunity to intern with the organisation, experiencing a vital learning curve there.

Apart from bagging the Digital Talent Performance Award, "the most exciting part was that I got to join an entrepreneurship incubation training programme," he shared when describing his internship later. "The mentors conducted the training virtually, and I learnt a lot where I was able to apply the knowledge acquired to achieve practical actions."

Chuah is pursuing his Bachelor of Business (Hons) degree in Management (BBMG) at WOU, having enrolled in the May 2020 intake as an On-Campus Learning (OCL) student.

The overall competition drew some 800 participants. Of these, twelve were shortlisted for an interview with the judging panel. Following this process, the list got narrower as five of them were shortlisted for the award.

The 25-year-old from Penang performed basic graphic design, basic e-commerce, online marketing and 3D gaming for the competition. "We were given different programming modules to choose from, and each module had its own timeframe," he said.

After completing all the modules, the participants were then tasked to secure an internship with a company. Chuah decided to approach PYDC itself. "Here, I was assigned to design their notebook, and this took me approximately three months to complete," he shared.

For his winning effort, he received a trophy and a certificate from the Penang Chief Minister during the awards ceremony

in Batu Kawan on 15 January 2022. "When I attended the Digital Talent ceremony, I knew I was one of the shortlisted participants, but it was a delightful shock and surprise when my name was called out for the award," he said.

He expressed gratitude to his parents for their unwavering support and to PYDC, especially general manager Dr Gwee Sai Ling who guided him throughout the project.

Chuah had cherished the dream of becoming a business entrepreneur since the age of nine when he started selling hot dogs at school for extra pocket money. "I was always interested in business, and I like to do research on how successful entrepreneurs manage their businesses and how they think differently from others."

Owing to his inquisitive and curious nature, he started to develop an interest in graphic design and technical support. "I enrolled in BBMG because I believe this programme is able to help me sharpen my knowledge and skills about the field of business so that I can apply these gems in the future," he asserted.

Underscoring his passion for business and graphics, he noted that graphic design is not as simple as what many people may think. "When we work with clients, we must think creatively and innovatively," he said.

An alumnus of SMJK Chung Ling, Penang, Chuah had worked part-time with Switch for over two years after getting his Diploma in Business Studies and prior to enrolling at WOU. "I sat next to a software engineer colleague, so I began learning about technical support from him," he explained.

Chuah's motto that has helped him reap success in life is to "never give up on whatever you are working on because you will succeed in the end".



# ROBOTIC ARM PROJECT COURTS CURIOSITY AND INTEREST AT CREATIVE DIGITAL DISTRICT

A robotic arm innovation by a WOU student caught the attention of Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow when he officially launched the Creative Digital District, also known as CD<sup>2</sup> @ George Town, recently. Chow gamely said "hi" to the hand with a fist bump before stopping to chat with Gobisankar Katereasian who was manning the exhibition booth.

The robotic limb was the outcome of a final year project titled *Integration of Robot Arm and Hand Control Using Sensing Technology* that took about six months to complete. Gobisankar and two other students created different components and later put them together.

Gobisankar expects to graduate from his Bachelor of Information Technology (Hons) in Computer Systems and Networks (BITC) programme this year.

Sharing about his chat with the chief minister, the 23-year-old described it as an unforgettable moment as he got a chance to meet and converse with the state leader. "I got a picture taken with him while I explained," he said.

"I was nervous at first because he is an important official and surrounded by the media and cameras flashing non-stop.



▲ Gobisankar explains how the robotic hand works to the Chief Minister.

When I started talking to him it was completely fine. He is a humble person.

"I managed to explain clearly. He asked me how the robot works, whether it is wireless, how I built the app to connect and control the robotic arm, and how this project will benefit others," he said.

▼ Chow doing a fist bump as a way of greeting. At left is Gobisankar.



Gobisankar explained that the innovation combines hardware and software technologies. "It involves the integration of mobile app, robotic arm, and wireless interaction between the robotic hand and glove."

He said the arm needs further enhancement before it can help companies with certain automated production processes or perform tasks that pose a risk to workers' safety.

Gobisankar feels the BITC degree suits him well. "I like computers and IT. With BITC, I can explore and gain the needed knowledge in computer networking," he said, expressing his hopes of working with leading companies like Intel, Dell or Jabil, or having an opportunity overseas.

WOU's School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) is now located within CD<sup>2</sup>, a unique hub to spur digital enterprises and talent. The School took part in an exhibition during the launch of CD<sup>2</sup> on 25 February 2022 to showcase the scientific creativity that is emerging from the University.

## What DiGiT students say

DiGiT offers the Bachelor of Digital Business (Honours) [BDBS] and Bachelor in Software Engineering (Honours) (Application Development) [BDSE] programmes via On-Campus Learning (OCL) for Year 1 students. They complete the rest of their studies via distance mode, while they undergo paid apprenticeship with industry partners.

**Abdul Kader Saifuddin**, 29, from Penang, is keen to acquire skills from BDBS to help in his family's business. "I can learn the fundamentals of businesses and marketing strategies to sustain and grow my family business in the future," he said. "The Covid-19 pandemic certainly opened my eyes on the digital tools and platforms available to level-up and pivot the business into something better."

**Tan Wai Ming**, 23, from Perak looks at BDSE as a pathway to realising his goal of becoming a good programmer. "I am very interested in software and how to write programmes," he said.

**Roophashri Chandaran**, 21, from Penang, signed up for BDBS as she hopes to set up her own business one day. "The digital skills required in the workplace are becoming more advanced, and companies expect most employees to have them," she said. She is appreciative of the WOU-LYL Scholarship as she found it hard to get a part-time job due to the pandemic.

# NEW DIGITAL ENCLAVE FOR START-UPS AND CREATIVE ARTS IN PENANG

WOU takes pride in being part of Penang's new Creative Digital District which incidentally is sited in a historically significant enclave within the UNESCO-listed heritage city of George Town.

Dubbed as CD<sup>2</sup> @ George Town, the zone - meant to serve as a hub for tech start-ups, universities and creative industries - was launched by Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow recently.

WOU's School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) is housed in the city campus building on China Street Ghaut within CD<sup>2</sup>. This provides the University with a strategic vantage point to partner with similarly aligned entities to produce future-ready talents and help build a thriving tech hub.

In his speech during the launch on 25 February 2022 at Think City's premises in CD<sup>2</sup>, Chow highlighted that the hub is one of the state government's placemaking projects to strengthen the Penang 2030 vision of "a family-focused, green and smart state that inspires the nation".

"The goal is to create a digital ecosystem in which tech start-ups, entrepreneurs, digital services and software companies can innovate in an environment that promotes 'Live, Learn, Work and Play' while retaining its heritage character," he explained.

"Over the next 3 years, the plan is to attract 50 digital

companies to invest and set up their operations here, to create 2,000 high-income jobs and serve as the anchors of the digital ecosystem," he added.

Eight companies have committed to establish their centres at CD<sup>2</sup>. They are Angkasa-X, Blue Skies, Censof, CTAPPS, Finexus, Karuna Sarawak, Securemetrics and TriAset.

Touching on the state's creative economy, Chow hailed the George Town Festival led by the Penang Exco for Tourism and Creative Economy as "a renowned annual event showcasing our talent in creative arts".

He pointed to the rise of NFTs and crypto art as evidence of the convergence of digital and creative initiatives. "We hope that by bringing together the creative and digital communities in the same district, the synergy will result in a thriving innovative ecosystem," he said.

In a similar vein, the state government looks forward to the fusion between heritage and digital enterprises at CD<sup>2</sup> in the coming years. "I believe that our academic institutions such as Universiti Sains Malaysia, Wawasan Open University, The One Academy and others, will produce great minds and prepare them for careers in the creative and digital industries," he said.

He invited digital investors from Malaysia and abroad to establish their bases here in CD<sup>2</sup>.



▲ Penang Chief Minister, YAB Chow Kon Yeow.

◀ WOU is partnering in efforts to revitalise the area. Over the next 3 years, the plan is to attract 50 digital companies to invest and set up their operations here, to create 2,000 high income jobs. (Sin Chew pic)



▼ Chow with representatives of the eight ecosystem partners. (Sin Chew pic)



## RETAINING TALENT, SPURRING INNOVATION AND DRAWING INVESTMENTS

Meanwhile, CEO of Digital Penang, Tony Yeoh, highlighted that Penang has ten industrial parks and a few dispersed MSC buildings focused on global business services. CD<sup>2</sup> is its first digital district.

"In Penang, our 50 years of industrialisation has continued to strengthen our position in the E&E (electrical and electronics) manufacturing ecosystem," he said, noting Penang's reputation as the "Silicon Valley of the East".

"The depth of engineering talent has enabled the ecosystem to move upstream, and we have companies in chip design, AI, IoT and many other deep technologies," he added. "Software-defined engineering skills are increasingly becoming critical."

Yeoh cited an outflow of 50% of software talent from Penang each year to more vibrant locations. "To retain and grow such software talent, we need to attract investment beacons and anchors that will rebalance this supply and demand for higher income jobs and create a stickier ecosystem," he explained.

Yeoh said the CD<sup>2</sup> will be a "catalyst to spur innovation and attract investments in digital technology, software services and creative arts" to revive the vicinity as a business district. "We imagine it to evolve its heritage character into a city campus that will see the convergence of creative and digital to become a vibrant livable and sustainable environment."

Critical to developing the district, which may take 10 years or beyond the 2030 vision, is infrastructure, especially connectivity, and talent. "As we attract more local and international big anchor companies in software and digital services to set up here, hopefully this will provide job opportunities for talent to stay," he foreshadowed.

In particular, the alliance between the private sector, investors, universities and young talents will strengthen Penang's competitive position going forward.

The launch saw the unveiling of initiatives in the coming months to drive the digital ecosystem of Penang, including the high-speed 5G network.

Others present at the event were WOU Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, Penang Institute Executive Director Dato' Dr Ooi Kee Beng, a few state executive councillors in charge of related portfolios, as well as leaders from the eight companies and other representatives.

*Creative Digital District, abbreviated CD<sup>2</sup> or CD Square, spans approximately 114 acres along Pengkalan Weld, Lebuh Light, Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling and Lebuh Acheh.*

*The CD<sup>2</sup> @ George Town will be the first location outside of the Klang Valley to be installed with the 5G network, bringing benefits to businesses and communities with the high-speed internet.*

# GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN TO NORMALISE IN SECOND HALF OF 2022, SAYS EXPERT

As the world still reels from a supply chain crisis that erupted in 2021, an expert has predicted that the situation will normalise in the second half of this year.

Dr Warren Loo Puai Keong noted that the Covid-19 lockdowns and new variants led to panic buying among households and businesses, while shipping demand surges worldwide caused delays and port congestions. Sea freight charges skyrocketed up to 700% because of container shortages.

There was also a global shortage of computer chips which impacted construction materials, as well as electronics and car production. Many businesses adopted e-commerce due to a rise in online shopping as consumer attitudes changed.

"Considering backlogs and unfulfilled orders, the supply chain crisis from 2021 will continue at least for the first half of 2022," Dr Loo said in his talk on *2022 Worldwide Supply Chain Trends* at a webinar organised by the School of Business & Administration (SBA) on 2 January 2022.

"Businesses will start to recover with increased output but increases in new orders and employment are slow as people wait and observe," he added. Dr Loo, who has over 15 years of experience with several MNC supply chains, also pointed out that the recovery phase will face some interruption as new variants hamper market confidence.

He stressed that the supply chain disruptions will persist in the first half of 2022, with lingering problems related to chip shortages, forecast adjustment, rise in prices, fraud, finding good suppliers and transportation.

"Many companies will realise that during the material shortages, people crazily placed orders with different distributors. It gave a false forecast of market needs, but this will slowly be adjusted to reflect reality," he explained.

Dr Loo also attributed the rise in prices in 2022 as being due to the material shortages from 2021 along with the backlogs and increase in costs of transportation, warehousing and labour. "When operating costs increase, the business will have to adjust the price of the product supplied to the market," he explained.

Dr Loo predicts fraud cases to rise as individuals exploit the demand to sell counterfeits at very low costs. Some companies may also review their partnerships with existing suppliers and look for alternative suppliers who can supply even in troubled times. Freight prices will continue to increase because of container shortages as new Covid-19 cases pose a threat to the supply chain.

Despite the challenges, he foresees worldwide supply chain to normalise by the second half of 2022 because of a cooling down of consumer spending on durable goods. Although businesses had over-forecasted in 2021 due to panic buying, the market is now absorbing the inflated forecasts for a more accurate depiction.

Also, there are less acute input shortages as inventories have returned to, or even exceeded, pre-crisis levels in most sectors because people have stopped over-stocking. He also foresees reduced shipping congestion with government initiatives to improve the flow at ports.

Meanwhile Louis Ng, a supply chain specialist, said the 2020-2021 lockdowns caused huge supply chain disruptions in Malaysia as businesses could not plan for inventory, warehousing and manpower.

He shared that though companies have adopted e-commerce, over 77% of SMEs in Malaysia are still at basic digitalisation stage with manual workforce needed on-site at warehouses to check on inventories and pack items.

*Supply chain disruptions will persist in the first half of 2022, with lingering problems related to chip shortages, forecast adjustment, rise in prices, fraud, finding good suppliers and transportation.*



▲ Dr Loo has over 15 years experience with MNC supply chains.



▲ Ng highlighted that manual labour is still needed on-site at warehouses.

# PATHWAYS TO PROMISING CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION AND MANUFACTURING

The construction and manufacturing industries are expected to undergo rapid growth in the coming years, providing promising employment and career advancement opportunities.

Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan, Deputy Dean of WOU's School of Science & Technology (SST), said construction is projected to grow by 7.1% in 2022, with a 6.2% average growth rate from 2023 to 2025.

He was speaking during an online talk on how WOU can prepare learners to become professionals in the sector. Over 50 people attended the recent event organised by SST and the Kuching Regional Centre. He noted that the federal government's 2022 Budget provides significant allocations to create more jobs in these industries.

"In December 2020, the government had approved in its 2021 Budget RM322.5 billion worth of projects," he said. "In the 2022 Budget, there will be a continuation of implementation of national infrastructure development projects worth RM3.5 billion."

He also pointed out that manufacturing had recorded a 29.8% growth in May 2021 compared to the corresponding month in 2020, with an expected 6.9% average growth rate in 2022.

Dr Tan added that the JaminKerja initiative under the 2022 Budget aims to create 600,000 job opportunities this year. The project involves an allocation of RM4.8 billion. There is also an RM80 million allocation under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) for skills training.

He also referred to the Critical Occupations List 2019/2020 of the Human Resources Ministry which ranks manufacturing and construction 9th and 10th respectively. "The construction and the manufacturing industries in Malaysia will expect a steady growth in the coming years and we expect more exciting job opportunities for them," he remarked.

In relation to this, Dr Tan highlighted three WOU degrees that help equip learners for these industries – the Bachelor of Technology (Honours) in Construction Management (BTCM); the MBA in Construction Management (MBACM); and the MBA in Manufacturing and Production Management (MBAMPM).

Meanwhile, SST Lecturer Dr Nurul 'Ulyani Mohd Najib said that workers in such fields as civil engineering, architecture, quantity survey, project management, real estate

▼ Dr Tan elaborated on the growth of construction and manufacturing.



▼ Dr Nurul listed the potential professional certifications for WOU graduates



development/management, safety and health, offshore, and telecommunications can apply for certain professional credentials, after obtaining their BTCM or MBACM degree.

## With WOU qualifications, workers can become a:

- Certified construction manager (Construction Industry Development Board)
- Professional technologist/technician (Malaysia Board of Technologists)
- Professional quantity, property or building surveyor (Royal Institute of Surveyor Malaysia)
- Certified project manager (Project Management Institute)
- Chartered construction manager (Chartered Institute of Building)
- Chartered surveyor (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyor)

At the same talk, SST Deputy Dean (Industry & Outreach), Dr Teoh Ping Chow, said that MBAMPM students have the opportunity to network with peers from the industry. A random alumni profile survey found many holding management-level positions like operations engineer/manager, QA manager, factory manager, operations engineer and product engineer.

He emphasised that the MBA credential affords them recognition, especially when they are dealing with government agencies, authorities and customers.



# ONE-STOP CENTRE WOULD BENEFIT TUMULTUOUS FREIGHT FORWARDING INDUSTRY



“There is a need for a one-stop centre to streamline operations and prevent backlog of goods at ports.”

Behind the veil of its growth projections are multiple complications that continue to dog the freight forwarding industry, presenting hectic daily challenges for its players.

Forexample, there are currently different procedures applied at different ports, leading to confusion. Shipments are not released if operators fail to comply with the documentation and compliance procedures of different countries.

WOU’s School of Business & Administration (SBA) senior lecturer Log. Stella Hoo Yee Hui explained that there is thus a need for a one-stop centre to streamline operations and prevent backlog of goods at ports. It would consolidate the relevant authorities, agencies and parties, improving how the continual flow of applications for approvals is managed.

She suggested simplifying procedures at the different ports and implementing digitalisation for smoother payments and transparency, thus curtailing unwarranted charges by a few black sheep in the industry.

Freight forwarding is forecast to grow due to globalisation and the rise of e-commerce. “The cargo volume is increasing, but freight forwarders have a very short time frame to deliver,” she said. “We must have data-driven decision making, as well as cloud computing, artificial intelligence and machine learning to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the supply chain.”

Hoo was speaking at an online talk on *A Glimpse into the Future of the Freight Forwarding Industry* organised by SBA and the Johor Bahru Regional Centre recently.

She cited seven challenges that freight forwarders face in delivering goods on time to their end customers. These comprise: commercial documentation and regulatory compliance; international payments (risk with unstable currencies); packaging (repacking to suit local needs)

and warehousing; cargo insurance; cargo security and dangerous goods; alternative transport solutions; and costing and quoting.

She said that commercial documentation and regulatory compliance make up the main challenges as each country has different requirements for certain items. Shipments are not released if freight forwarders are unaware of changes in procedures at other countries.

There are also risks with unstable currencies. This is because freight forwarders deal with international payments as they handle exports and imports while liaising with companies from different countries.

Some imports into Malaysia require special labels, such as for a halal certificate or nutrition-related facts. “All these would require repacking and value-added service in the warehouse to suit the needs of the local market,” she commented.

Hoo also touched on cargo insurance for items that are transported via sea or air. The transit time is lengthened due to issues like documentation, paying of duties, inspection, and quarantine of dangerous goods/suspicious items. All these give freight forwarders a very short time frame to deliver their goods.

She pointed out that there are alternative transport solutions available if the air freight is too costly, such as ground transport or sea freight, although these may take longer.

She said local companies in Malaysia invest heavily on assets like warehouse, equipment and vehicles to provide a comprehensive and total logistics service – but are prohibited by the authorities from simply increasing prices of deliveries. She asserted that freight forwarders must have a strong cash flow since they provide the services in advance and collect payments later.

# RISING ABOVE LOSS AND DESPAIR OF TRAGIC DECEMBER FLOODS

Malaysians across several states were heavily impacted by a series of devastating floods that took place around December 2021, with Selangor and Pahang being the hardest hit. The tragedy stirred two open distance learning (ODL) students of WOU from Kuala Lumpur to help bring relief and much-needed support to those affected.

## MANAGER CALLS OFF VACATION TO HELP OTHERS IN DISTRESS

Sometime close to the eve of the new year, **Stella Hui Sook Peng** received a message on her mobile phone on the immense damage caused by the floods and the loss of property borne by the victims. The "heart-wrenching video footages and photos posted on social media", as she described them, prompted the 33-year-old to do something.

Hui, who works as a strategic accounts manager, not only shared the message with her contacts but also cancelled holiday plans with her family to focus on helping those in distress. "Despite the short notice, my friend and I managed to raise about RM10,000 in cash and in kind from our contacts within five days."

They scoured various stores to buy essential items for affected families in Karak which had seen some of the worst floods. Hui volunteered at the Kechara Forest Retreat to help distribute aid to residents of an affected housing area in Karak.

"We managed to distribute necessities to over a hundred families. Though exhausting, it was a rewarding experience for us." Among the poignant memories was a gesture by a resident who cooked lunch for a few volunteers with the little she had managed to salvage.

After that, Hui went on to help in Hulu Langat where houses were still muddy after more than three weeks. "I joined my sister-in-law and an NGO to perform house-to-house visits at a residential area," she said. What struck a chord in her was seeing the victims, despite the plight they were in, being "just grateful for the safety of family members", and how resilient they were despite suffering destruction to their homes and incurring huge losses.

Hui enrolled in May 2021 to pursue the Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology (BMPS) degree.

▼ Hui visiting one of the houses in flood-wrecked Hulu Langat.



## EDUCATOR'S LINGERING LESSONS FROM A MUDDIED 'WAR-TORN ZONE'

Dedication to community service and a readiness to volunteer have always been part of **Vasanthi Devi Subramaniam's** humane DNA. It therefore came as no surprise when the senior assistant/teacher sprung into action upon seeing the plight of the flood victims and imagining herself in their shoes.

With the credo "an extra hand is always welcome during a crisis", she volunteered with an NGO to help clean up residences in the heavily ravaged Sri Muda area in Selangor. She described the township, mostly covered with mud and rubbish, as reflecting a "war-torn zone".

"I did not expect what I saw," said Vasanthi, 43, reflecting on how distressing it must have been for the victims to throw away their damaged belongings, including those that held deep sentimental value.

"We were literally in mud for almost six hours, cleaning non-stop every day. In one house, we practically had to discard everything, and in another the tiles of the house had broken into fragments, adding to the mess."

She was also touched that many others came out to help, including locals and Bangladeshi workers, embodying the #kitajagakita principle.

Vasanthi, with aspirations to become a principal, is studying for her Bachelor of Education (Hons) degree in Primary Education (BEPE), having enrolled in May 2021.



► Vasanthi (foreground) in the thick of things.

# TACKLING ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

As we transition to the “new normal” and recover from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to be cognisant about the mental health of teenagers and young adults. This would cover one’s psychological, emotional and social wellbeing. Mental health affects how a person handles the normal stresses of life, makes life choices, gets along with others and is able to contribute to society.

According to clinical psychologist Tan Zong Yan, the founder of Labyrinth Psychological Centre, Johor Bahru, it is important for youngsters to have a strong support system, such as from family, friends, or professionals. He cited three major causes of mental health problems – biological factors (e.g. heredity, genetics, and prenatal conditions), life experiences and family history.

Tan was speaking during an online talk on *Mental Health of Adolescents and Young Adults Post Covid-19* held recently. The event was organised by the School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS) and the Penang Regional Centre.

He cautioned that the behaviour of adults in a family become models for adolescents. “Adolescents may model the behaviour and coping skills of parents and the other adults in the family,” he elaborated.

A person can also be impacted by traumatic experiences and a family history of mental illness. The pandemic can give rise to fear of infection, social disconnectedness and financial difficulties, increasing youngsters’ stress reactions and leading to various mental health problems.

Adolescents who experienced previous trauma, besides social isolation and quarantine during the pandemic, are more prone to anxiety and depression.



► Tan explains how to safeguard the mental health of youngsters. (Facebook pic)



“Adolescents who experienced previous trauma, besides social isolation and quarantine during the pandemic, are more prone to anxiety and depression,” he remarked. Other stressors can be Internet connectivity issues during online learning, threat of parents’ unemployment and heightened family tension.

As such, we should recognise the signs and symptoms of mental illness that they may face. These include feeling sad; reduced ability to concentrate; excessive fears and worries; extreme feelings of guilt; extreme mood changes; withdrawing from friends and activities; intense tiredness or problem in sleeping; detachment from reality, and paranoia or hallucinations. They may also suffer from agitation or irritability; difficulty in relating to situations and people; problems with alcohol or drug abuse; poor appetite or binge eating; excessive anger, hostility or violence; and harbouring of suicidal thoughts.

Tan suggested seeking professional help from registered counsellors, clinical psychologists or psychiatrists to manage symptoms and prevent a relapse of mental illness.

“You don’t need the added pressure of reverting fast to your pre-pandemic schedules and expectations. Allow yourself to adjust gradually to your former routine,” he advised.

“Be mindful of what works for you when rebuilding your routine. Just because you were doing something before the pandemic, which was helpful then, it may not work well now,” he stressed. “Go at your own pace. Don’t force yourself to go out with friends if you’re not ready.”

Tan also offered some self-care tips for coping with mental health crisis. One can set and maintain a routine; focus on things you can control; maintain social connection; focus on the present; enjoy music or read books; consume reliable news sources and limit exposure to news and social media; look for ways to help your community; and be appreciative.

Replying to a question, he recommended assessment for proper diagnosis, and religious support for added strength when going through treatment and recovery.



# ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY WITH **INTERNATIONAL CEFR COURSE**

WOU's School of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences (SEHS) began offering its English Preparatory Course, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), in June 2021. The CEFR is a globally recognised standard on language ability.

Three students from the inaugural batch who completed the 6-month course, held online, share how they have benefited.

## LANGUAGE MASTERY TO RADIATE THE CAREER HORIZON



**Jennifer Anano Arce**, 43, has been teaching preschool and lower primary children at an international school in Johor Bahru for over ten years. She holds a Diploma in Early Childhood Education (DECE) from WOU.

She took the English Preparatory Course to improve her language proficiency and boost her confidence in teaching English. It has certainly developed her vocabulary and grammar, and she now feels a sense of accomplishment in completing the course.

"Professionally, it gives me an edge as fluency on par with international standards is valued, and it also opens up future learning and career pathways," she said.

The course has enhanced her capabilities in reading, listening, speaking, and writing in English. "I began to understand my weaknesses, particularly on what areas I needed to focus on and develop," she added.

The CEFR certification, she stressed, augments the learner's professional resume. Since English is a useful communication tool in the global marketplace, it boosts one's prospects when applying for jobs.

## OPENING THE GATES TO A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF KNOWLEDGE



IT professional **Teoh Siew Yin** from Penang has not only enhanced her workplace communication skills but can now also access an enormously wider world of knowledge. This is largely because there are countless resources and websites in English, which she can better explore, thanks to the CEFR.

"In my job, I need to communicate in English, either in writing or speaking," she explained. "English is an international language, and we need to master it to gain more knowledge and broaden our perspectives since many books and websites are in English."

Teoh, 37, especially found the weekly lessons providing her with good opportunity for practice. "We practised speaking in class every week. This gave me more confidence to write and speak in English," she shared.

She also learnt how to source for resources to enhance her language skills, enabling her to continue her "learning journey". "We learnt from our peers and the tutors guided us, with assignments for us to give presentations and talks in class."

## EDITOR'S WEAKNESS AND LACK OF CONFIDENCE TURN INTO STRENGTH



**Soo Mei Chong** was concerned about her lack of confidence in speaking and writing in English, as it was her weakest subject since primary school. The 39-year-old executive editor in Penang pushed herself out of her comfort zone, drawing motivation from her supervisor to join the CEFR course.

"The course has sharpened my English, refreshed my grammar and helped overcome my fear of the language," she said. The lessons were convenient as the classes and examination sessions were conducted remotely.

She said that her newfound self-confidence with the language will help her in writing articles and giving presentations, besides encouraging her to improve herself further.

"We learnt to master grammar, writing skills, pronunciations and social communication skills. I am now more careful to check on my grammar," she shared. "I could speak fluently during my class presentations although I felt nervous. I am happy that I made the wise decision to join the course."

# ACHIEVING ACCOUNTING DEGREE PLUS CIMA RECOGNITION

Despite an incredible eight-year gap in her studies that was sadly forced upon her, Ashley Yeoh Beng Hoon followed through on her passion and successfully earned the Bachelor of Business (Hons) degree in Accounting (BBAC) at WOU last year.

She had enrolled in the July 2007 intake for open distance learning (ODL) but had to take a step back because she needed to focus on helping her family financially.

In 2015, she felt galvanised to resume her studies when she attended her youngest brother's convocation ceremony for his PhD at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Her brother often motivated her by stressing how important education is in today's marketplace if she wanted to move up in her career.

Though the 44-year-old from Penang had had a jumpy start, enrolling for a semester, and then staying away from studies for eight long years, she neither gave up nor lost heart.

To cap off the achievement, when Yeoh finally fulfilled her degree, she also obtained a Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) A-Star qualification in January 2022. This was due to the BBAC degree offering a fast-track route to gain the professional recognition.

Yeoh has been working as an account executive with a shipping agent whose headquarters is in Singapore. She is happy to have the required certifications to re-ignite her career and entrepreneurship aspirations. "My goal is to open my own firm one day. Without the minimum requirement as an accountant, I was unable to achieve my goals," she said, adding that the CIMA qualification has put her on the right track.



▲ Yeoh is an Account Executive.

"With my CIMA membership, I am granted access to the Association of International Certified Professional Accountants (AICPA). This will further amplify my career as it connects me to finance and accounting professionals in every industry from around the world, and provides other benefits as well," she explained.

Yeoh knows only too well that the market has become increasingly competitive. To secure a job, survive or advance in a career, one must enhance knowledge and skills by acquiring relevant professional certifications.

She recommends WOU for an accelerated pathway to a CIMA qualification. "WOU is the best university, and the course materials are very useful to anyone who wants to pursue CIMA," she said.

## Contact Us

### MAIN CAMPUS

Wawasan Open University  
54 Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah,  
10050 Penang, Malaysia.  
Tel: 04-218 0333  
Fax: 04-226 9323

### WOU Regional and Support Centres

Open Tuesday to Sunday:  
10.00am - 7.00pm

### Penang Regional Centre

54 Jalan Sultan Ahmad Shah,  
10050 Penang, Malaysia.  
Tel: 04-218 0133/4  
Fax: 04-228 4500

### Ipoh Regional Centre

Wisma Gerakan,  
80 Persiaran Greenhill,  
30450 Ipoh, Perak.  
Tel: 05-242 6323 / 243 6323  
Fax: 05-254 9323

### Kuala Lumpur Regional Centre

Level 3 Menara PGRM,  
8 Jalan Pudu Ulu,  
56100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.  
Tel: 03-9281 7323 / 9283 8323  
Fax: 03-9284 9323

### Bandar Utama Regional Support Centre

L2-6, Wisma BU8,  
11, Lebuhr Bandar Utama,  
Bandar Utama,  
47800 Petaling Jaya,  
Selangor.  
Tel: 03-7629 7223 / 7629 7123  
Fax: 03-7629 7023

### Johor Bahru Regional Centre

48, Jalan Pertama 1  
Pusat Perdagangan  
Danga Utama,  
81300 Skudai, Johor  
Tel: 07-5624875 / 5564323 /  
5566323

### Kuching Regional Centre

14 Westin Avenue,  
Jalan Tun Jugah,  
93350 Kuching, Sarawak.  
Tel: 082-578 923  
Fax: 082-576 923

## LET US HEAR FROM YOU

Email us at [enquiry@wou.edu.my](mailto:enquiry@wou.edu.my) | For more details, visit [wou.edu.my](http://wou.edu.my) | Call Toll-free 1-300-888-968 (WOU) | ☎ 019-474 9323