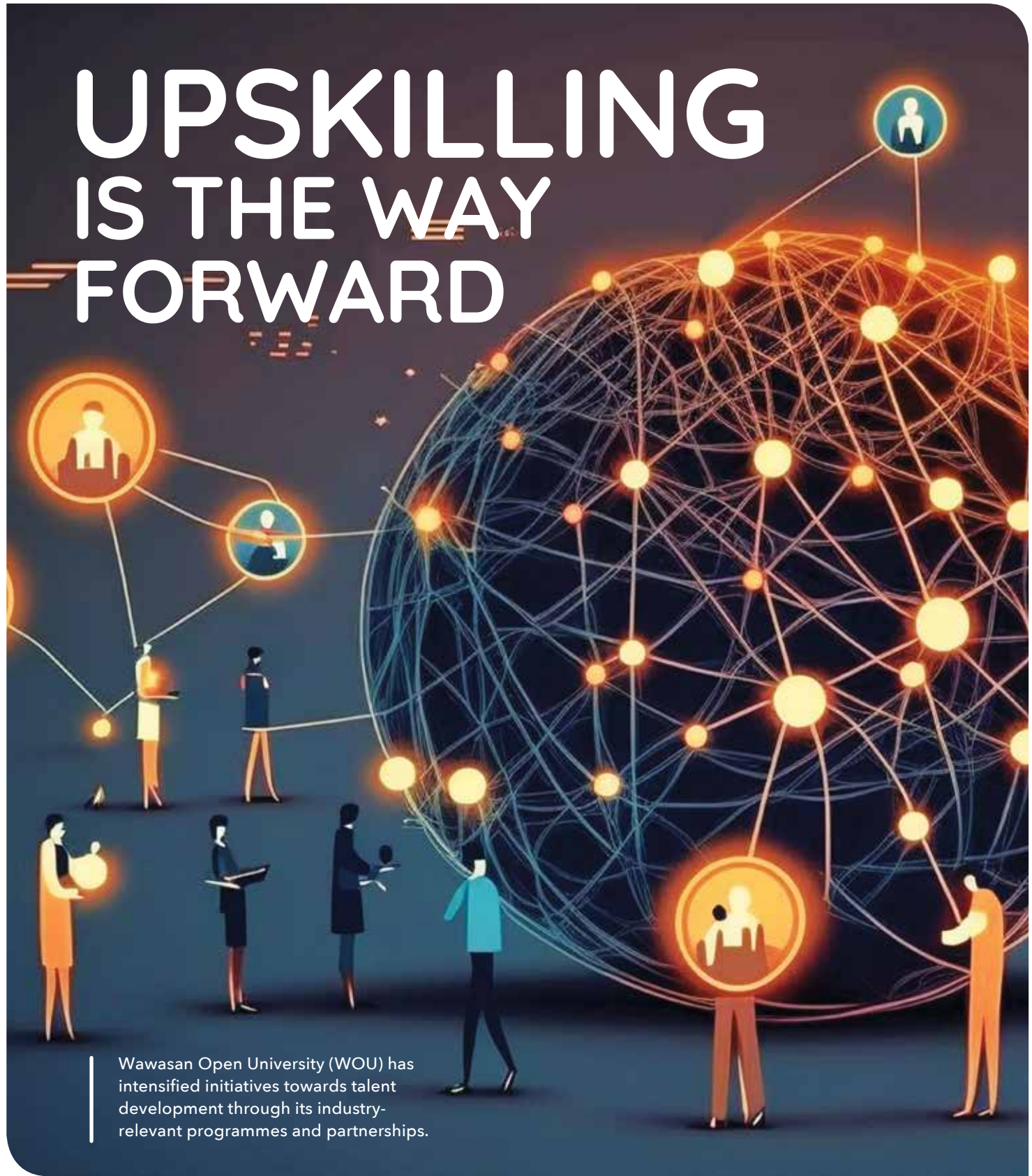


UPSKILLING IS THE WAY FORWARD



Wawasan Open University (WOU) has intensified initiatives towards talent development through its industry-relevant programmes and partnerships.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." - Henry Ford

WOU is excited about moving forward, leveraging not only on technology but also on established partnerships, to improve its products and services and to reach a wider community of learners.

The University continually evolves its programmes to match the changing times and improve learner-instructor interaction. Through the support of innovative tools, it can obtain real-time feedback on students' academic performance, how they engage with the lessons, and their interaction with academia.

In the midst of the digital era, WOU seeks to address talent shortage and make greater headway into the local and international markets in terms of enrolment. It is for this purpose that WOU has linked up with like-minded stakeholders, expanding its educational, research and talent development initiatives.

The University saw a hive of signing ceremonies recently where it forged smart partnerships with education providers and professional bodies. The collaboration opens up opportunities for the parties to these agreements to work together in upskilling the workforce. It also facilitates the sharing of ideas and joint capacity-building efforts in the areas of teaching and learning, and research.

WOU wants to be at the forefront of talent development and contribute to the socio-economic growth of the state and nation. The agreements signed will no doubt drive this aspiration.

Apart from reaching communities with flexible, affordable higher education options, WOU is equally committed to its social responsibility of raising awareness and educating the public. Activities like the talk on cyber safety given by a WOU academic at a school in Penang, and the hosting of an English Language workshop for Thai schoolchildren, reinforce the University's commitment to community outreach.

Last but not least, congratulations to the School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE) for teaming up with Technological Association Malaysia (TAM) to organise a two-day national symposium. This gathering of academia, industry practitioners and other experts from across the country could potentially bring about an increased adoption of greener technologies for sustainable urban living.

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TECHNOLOGY, TOURISM AND TALENT: THE DRIVERS OF PENANG'S GROWTH

▼ Tan Sri Sheng highlights the 3T strategy.



▼ Dato' Abdul Halim from the state government.



▼ Dato' Lee says Penang will face a technology explosion. (The Star pic)



▼ Mak speaks about diversification. (Business Today pic)



Technology, Tourism and Talent (3T) are the key factors expected to drive Penang's progressive future and sustainable growth.

This was revealed by **Tan Sri Andrew Sheng**, Chairman of WOU's George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies (GIOAS).

He said, "Penang is well-positioned to take advantage of a growth strategy that extends beyond manufacturing to include digital services, manufacturing support and creative green services."

"Malaysia must find its niche in the global knowledge-based economy (KBE) because technology and eco-tourism are key value-added contributors to potential income and exports," he added.

Tan Sri Sheng was speaking in a panel session on *Attracting Investments, Forging Growth & Prosperity* at the recent Penang Future Forward Summit 2023. The designations of George Town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve can help develop high-value tourism in Penang and generate substantial income, he explained.

Highlighting the importance of education in the adoption of the 3T strategy, he urged companies to not only retain talents but to also invest generously in their development. He appealed to the academia, business and civil service sectors to collaborate as a team to define Penang's strategic strengths and opportunities.

"The real secret lies in establishing partnerships between local players and foreign MNCs (multinational corporations) as well as the government and universities to upgrade our brain power and our talent," he stressed.

Meanwhile Penang State Executive Councillor for Trade, Industry and Entrepreneurial Development, **Dato' Abdul**

Halim Hussain, echoed that Penang is well-positioned for growth, having already established a strong ecosystem in the electrical and electronics (E&E) sector.

It is time for Penang to expand beyond the E&E sector and attract investments in other sectors, so as to maintain a strong and sustainable growth. These include medical tourism, wellness, agricultural technology, food technology and green initiatives, he pointed out.

He said digitalisation is also a priority for Penang, as seen by the formation of Digital Penang in 2020 to support and facilitate the growth of the start-up ecosystem.

Penang Chief Minister's special investment advisor and InvestPenang director, **Dato' Seri Lee Kah Choon**, said Penang was on the verge of a technology explosion which offered a promising economic landscape with many exciting business opportunities.

He noted, "The inevitable use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology and automation-driven manufacturing processes like quantum computing, augmented reality and 3D printing will require electronics. Penang's critical role in the global E&E sector underscores the importance of the industry to the state and country."

Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia Berhad managing director and chief executive officer, **Mak Joon Nien**, drew attention to how important it is to diversify across the value chain and play upstream in technology.

"MNCs are attracted to the established ecosystem rather than tax incentives when choosing to invest in Penang. There must be greater collaboration between institutions, and more support from the state and federal governments in developing relevant skill sets," he said.

The session was moderated by Penang-Chengdu Friendship Association president Stephen Lai.

HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS SPEAK UP FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN LIVING

URBAN SUSTAINABILITY THREATENED BY AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution is threatening urban sustainability as the world population boom intensifies rural-urban migration.

Peninsula Higher Education Group president, **Prof Dr Ian Pashby**, cited the six threats to urban sustainability as suburban sprawl, waste disposal, water quality, energy use, climate change and air quality. The world population is predicted to increase from the current 8.05 billion to 10 billion in 2050, and correspondingly, the urban population from 4.4 billion to seven billion.

"The world's largest city, Chongqing, has 31 million people, and Delhi will take over in 2050 with an estimated 49.6 million population," he said. Each person in Chongqing generates 1.08kg of solid waste daily.

He continued, "Chongqing treats an equivalent of nearly two million swimming pools of waste water each year. Its energy use will reach 255 metric tonnes of carbon equivalent in 2025."

Furthermore, climate change will lead to an increased intensity and frequency of disasters like floods, fires, tornadoes and tropical storms, he added.

DANGER OF AIR POLLUTION

Air pollution is assessed by the presence of particulate matter (PM) of up to 2.5 microns in diameter which can enter through the lungs into the bloodstream.

He said, "The World Health Organisation safe limit for continuous exposure of PM2.5 particles is 5 microgrammes (mcg) per cubic metre of air. For exceptional events, the limit for a single day exposure is 15mcg."

Speaking on *The Danger of Air Pollution in an Ever Urbanising World* on 13 May 2023, Prof Pashby said air pollution could cause increased incidences of asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis and other respiratory tract diseases, cancers and heart diseases.

"More than a billion people are exposed to outdoor air pollution yearly," he stressed. This will lead to more than six million premature deaths a year, 93 million days illness, and loss of economic output valued at US\$8 trillion globally.

Two keynote speakers from institutions of higher learning explained how global pollution is threatening sustainable urban living, and the concerted action needed to overcome these challenges.

They were addressing over 100 people at the National Symposium on *Technologies for Sustainable Urban Development* (TechSUD 2023), held at the WOU main campus from 13-14 May 2023. It was organised by WOU's School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE) and Technological Association Malaysia (TAM).

The participants comprised academia, researchers, technologists, industry practitioners, and representatives from government agencies. Nearly 40 technical papers were presented on such topics as green technologies, sustainable construction, policies and strategies in urban development, and climate change.

▼ Prof Rashby points to the diminishing air quality in urban areas. (PKT Logistics Group pic).



SOURCES OF AIR POLLUTANTS

Countries ranked with PM2.5 levels (very good air quality) are Iceland, New Zealand, Australia and Finland, while countries with bad air quality include India, China, Pakistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Chad and other parts of Africa. "Only 15 countries average the safe limit of 5mcg. Malaysia has 17.7mcg per cubic metre of PM2.5s," he highlighted.

The most polluted cities are Dammam (124), Lahore (112), New Delhi (89), Dhaka (85), and Muzaffarnagar (81). In comparison, Jakarta recorded 36.2, Beijing 29.8, Kuala Lumpur 17.6, London 9.6, and Canberra 2.8.

Prof Pashby categorised the man-made sources of air pollution as agricultural, industrial, combustion, power generation, wood/coal burning, and construction. However, natural sources are dust storms, sandstorms and wild fires, which are all exacerbated by climate change.

He opined that the solutions to air pollution must involve technology, regulatory, behavioural (e.g. education) and economic factors (e.g. sanctions).

BALANCING ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: TOUGH FOR NATIONS

Government leaders tend to send conflicting signals on combating climate change due to the challenge of balancing ecological sustainability and economic progress.

Prof Dr Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz from WOU's School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE) was speaking on *From Rio Earth Summit to COP26: Malaysia's Pledges, Political Leadership, Policies, Administrative Apparatus and Performance* at the symposium on 14 May 2023.

In his keynote address, he said Malaysia's global climate change commitments started with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Here, Malaysia pledged to maintain at least 50% of its land mass under forest and tree cover. Malaysia also ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994.

"At COP26 (Conference of Parties 26) in 2021, the government ambitiously committed to reduce carbon intensity by 45% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. And a month before the meeting, the then prime minister pledged to make Malaysia a carbon neutral country by 2050," he highlighted.

He observed, "In the span of 30 years, Malaysia's commitment to combat climate change has become increasingly ambitious."

"Making pledges is easy but fulfilling them is no easy feat as the country balances climate change goals and socio-economic progress," he stressed.

Prof Abdul Rashid listed the three factors that influence the success of the pledges - political leadership; policies and other related documents; and the administrative apparatus.

He said all the Malaysian prime ministers from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim subscribed to the same green agenda. "Their actions upon taking power are, however, conflicting. They renege on their promises, such as the approval of the Penang South Reclamation project," he pointed out.



▲ Prof Abdul Rashid highlights how political leadership impacts climate change.

He quoted Tun Mahathir as saying that they must weigh environmental loss prevention efforts against the growing socio-economic development needs from an increasing population. The people's demand for food, water and other infrastructures will put pressure on the natural resources and environment.

Prof Abdul Rashid lamented, "The need to balance climate goals and economic progress is affecting the government's ability to fulfil its promises."

He also highlighted the policies, action plans, blueprints and master plans constructed by the government to fulfil its climate change commitment. Examples are the "Low Carbon Mobility Blueprint 2021-2030" and the "Strategic Plan 2020-2030: Environmental Sustainability in Malaysia".

Malaysia is clearly not short of government documents to address climate change. He however wondered how the administrative apparatus (e.g. Ministries and national councils) involved is fulfilling all of the government's environmental pledges. "Multiple ministries crafted the documents unveiled over the last 30 years. The documents are disconnected and there is a lack of inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation," he stated.

In assessing Malaysia's performance in meeting its pledges, he referred to the Washington Post's investigation which found Malaysia - and few other countries - to have under-reported its greenhouse emissions to the UNFCCC in 2020.

Prof Abdul Rashid concluded: "Some climate scientists warn that we are standing on the cliff-edge. If countries are under-reporting their greenhouse emissions to UNFCCC, then we are closer to the cliff-edge than we think."



▲ TAM committee members with WOU academics.

WOU RECOGNISED FOR CONTRIBUTING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

WOU was honoured with the Penang Icon Leadership Award for Education at the Penang Future Forward Summit 2023. The University was recognised for its outstanding and unique contribution in higher education, particularly in the field of open distance learning (ODL).

Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan accepted the award on behalf of WOU from Penang Yang di-Pertua Negeri Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak at the summit's opening ceremony recently.

"We are extremely honoured to receive the award. I trust this is in recognition of the WOU brand as one of the country's foremost tertiary education providers in open and flexible distance learning," she said delightedly.

"We will not rest on our laurels. We will continue to innovate and further our mission to produce future-ready graduates," she added.

The citation read at the award presentation noted that "WOU has made its mark in the field of open distance and digital learning in Malaysia. It welcomes people from all walks of life with its provision of an affordable and flexible, quality higher education."

It continued, "WOU seeks to ensure young working adults get the best in their pursuit of a university qualification for greener pastures. WOU's tagline, "Think Tomorrow", speaks of the University's commitment to produce industry-ready graduates who can compete in today's digitally-transformed workplaces."

The citation concluded, "Its online learning platforms are interactive and engaging. The study structure at WOU allows networking with experts and fellow learners from various industry backgrounds. All of these combine to offer an enriching student learning experience."

Earlier, in his opening keynote address titled *Penang - Striving*



▲ Prof Chan (2nd from left) and DiGiT head Dr Lee Heng Wei (2nd from right) happily hold the award bestowed on WOU.

for Greater Unity, Progress and Prosperity, Tun Ahmad Fuzi said the state government was fully aware of the growing importance of technology and innovation. As such, it was making every possible effort to meet the demand for talents.

He added, "Penang is investing heavily into education and training programmes, including providing opportunities for lifelong learning, so that our workforce will be ready for the jobs of the future."

More than 300 people consisting of key leaders and representatives from the government, industry, academia and civil society participated in the second edition of the summit.

The event was organised by KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific and the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI) northern branch.

WOU: A PREMIER ODL UNIVERSITY

WOU caters to the diverse workforce needs of the digital economy. For this, it continually revamps courses, adopts new robust learning platforms, and integrates knowledge from different disciplines.

With the support of technology-enabled distance and digital learning, learners get to enjoy accessible, flexible, interactive and personalised higher education. This should appeal to today's millennials who represent a large percentage of the University's student population.

All WOU programmes are accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and approved by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). Interested learners can also take up bite-size courses in the form of micro-credentials for specific skills to improve their job performance and competencies.

COLLABORATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD STRATEGICALLY IN CONTINUAL EDUCATION



It is more promising for institutions and organisations to cooperate for the future of higher education and talent development. In the digital world of today, where everything is interconnected and networking is crucial, WOU, in its capacity, has been reaching out to establish smart partnerships for maximum reach and greater impact.

This underlining objective led to the recent spate of agreements by WOU with renowned international open universities, esteemed education providers and highly-respected professional organisations.

The agreements pave the way for better collaboration in talent development, knowledge sharing, research and training initiatives, student and fellowship exchanges, conferences, and so forth.

In adopting this approach, WOU will be able to strengthen its reputation as a provider of flexible, quality higher education via digital and open distance learning (ODL) amongst the local and international communities.



▲ After the signing (from right): Dr Chow, Prof Chan, Sallis and Azlan.

FOCUSED ON UPGRADING AND UPSKILLING

WOU-ISP pact to equip teachers with qualifications and skills

The oft-repeated grievance is that Malaysia is lacking properly trained teaching professionals to fill the many vacancies in schools, both in the cities and remote areas. In heeding this call, WOU has united with another education provider to ensure that the schools across the country have optimum access to qualified, skilled teachers.

WOU and the International Schools Partnership (ISP) Malaysia entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), girded by a common goal. ISP Malaysia operates and owns Tenby Educare Sdn Bhd and Tenby Education Sdn Bhd.

The partnership will provide a faster pathway for the teachers of both schools, along with all ISP Malaysia employees and its affiliated schools, to obtain their Masters of Education (MEd) at WOU. This is because they will get credit transfers to pursue their Master's once they obtained their Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at the University.

WOU offers the MEd programme in four specialisations. The majors are Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL), e-Learning, Education Management, and Early Childhood Education (ECE) (to be launched in September 2023).

The MoA also covers incentives for ISP employees to take up bachelor's degree programmes under the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (SEHS) in the fields of Primary Education, Psychology, English Studies, and Liberal Studies.

In return, ISP Malaysia will offer internship opportunities for WOU students and hire suitably qualified WOU graduates to work in their schools.

Both parties happily signed the agreement in Kuala Lumpur on 9 May 2023. The partnership will also facilitate collaboration in curriculum development, research, talks and other academic activities.

WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor, Prof Dr Lily Chan, signed on behalf of the University and Regional Managing Director Iain John Sallis for ISP Malaysia. Acting as witnesses were SEHS Dean, Assoc Prof Dr Thomas Chow Voon Foo, and ISP Malaysia's Director of National Schools, Azlan Sharom.

ISP is a growing global network of international schools which oversees 62 schools in 17 countries. Nine of those schools are in Malaysia operating under three separate brands - Tenby Schools, Asia Pacific Schools and Straits International Schools.

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COLLABORATIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD STRATEGICALLY IN CONTINUAL EDUCATION

FOCUSED ON UPGRADING AND UPSKILLING

WOU - TI Penang venture to develop engineering talents

There is an urgent need to aggressively promote Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in schools, and encourage the students to pursue STEM-focused subjects at the university-level.

To kick start this, WOU has formalised a Note of Understanding (NoU) with SM Teknik Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra at the main campus on 3 May 2023. They are committed to working together to develop human capital in the field of engineering for Penang.

WOU's School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE) will be sharing its expertise and programmes with the staff and students/alumni of the school. Among the degree programmes available are mechatronics, electronics, digital business and software engineering.

The school, formerly known as Technical Institute of Penang (TI Penang), has a total enrolment of about 600 students, all in Forms Four and Five.

The NoU was formalised by Principal Mohd Salim Mohamed Yusoff for the school and Prof Chan for WOU.

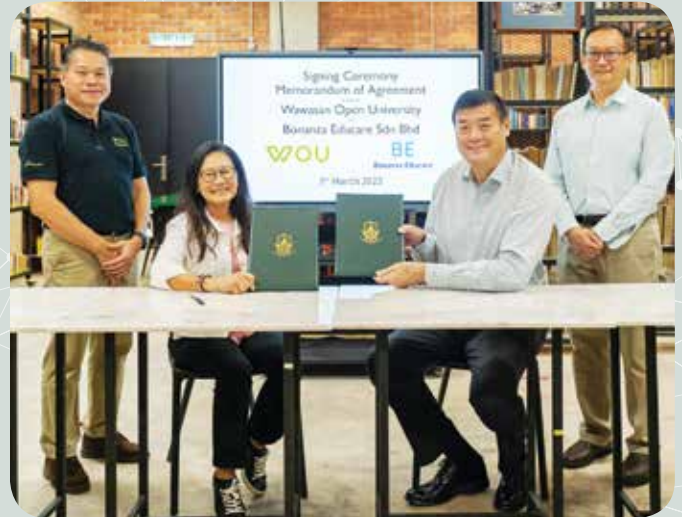
Link-up with BE to increase human capital development

The nurturing of young children bode well for society and the nation.

With this in mind, WOU inked a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with Bonanza Educare (BE) Sdn Bhd, a subsidiary of Bonanza Venture Holdings.

They are to collaborate in recruitment, training and education. BE will offer internship and training programmes to WOU students to strengthen their skills for industry. The students and graduates of WOU will be recruited by BE for part-time or full-time employment.

▼ All smiles (from left) - Chong, Prof Chan, Dato' Lim and Tan.



WOU will also promote its programmes to the BE workforce, giving incentives to BE employees and immediate family members. Both parties will conduct joint research and development projects, seminars, forums and other educational activities.

Prof Chan and BE director Datuk Lim Si Boon signed the agreement in Ipoh on 1 March 2023. It was witnessed by WOU's Regional Operations and Marketing Director Chong Kong Hoong and BE director Edwin Tan Beow Aik.

BE develops schools and learning spaces for two to 18-year-olds in Malaysia.

ACCORD WITH PROFESSIONAL BODIES FOR HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Advancing education and increasing talents in Sarawak

WOU and the Sarawak Dayak Graduates Association (SDGA) have a common goal, that is, the development of education and human capital development in Sarawak.

This shared aspiration led to the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between WOU and SDGA at SDGA's office in Kuching on 10 May 2023. They will collaborate to expand educational and human capital development opportunities amongst the Dayak community in the state.

The SDGA members and immediate family will enjoy tuition fee rebates under WOU's Valued Partnership Programme (VPP) when they enrol for studies. Other efforts are the joint organising of activities and collaboration in research and development projects.

WOU's School of Technology and Engineering Science (STE) Dean Assoc Prof Ts Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt and SDGA president Dr Jawing Chunggat were the signatories.



▲ Assoc Prof Dr Sean Tan Koon Tatt (left) of WOU with SDGA president Dr Jawing Chunggat.

Tripartite agreement to boost skilled talents in Sarawak

The premier of Sarawak has set the target for the state to register at least 10,000 technicians and technologists by 2025 to help boost its economy.

Hence, WOU's forging of a tripartite partnership with the Malaysia Board of Technologists (MBOT) and the Association of Professional Technicians and Technologists (APTT) was a good move in the right direction. The agreement seeks to empower the University's technology graduates and bolster talent growth, especially in Sarawak.

Dr Tan represented WOU at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) exchange ceremony during the MBOT Borneo Symposium in Kuching on 11 May 2023.

WOU will work with MBOT and APTT to continuously upskill the nation's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) talents. This would help address the existing talent gap, while contributing to innovation and talent development in Sarawak and the country.

For a start, WOU will offer its STEM-focused programmes – e.g. electronics, mechatronics, manufacturing and production management, systems design engineering, and construction management – to MBOT and APTT members. WOU will also assist to register its new graduates with MBOT.

MBOT, since its establishment in 2016, has registered more than 70,000 technologists and technicians, with over 5,000 of them from Sarawak and Sabah.

FINDING SYNERGY WITH INTERNATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITIES

WOU and UPOU seal friendship with formal agreement

WOU is confident that its formal partnership with the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) will reap mutual benefits.



▲ The WOU team with Prof Bandalaria (left).

▼ WOU and UT give a thumbs up to the partnership.



They will focus on three areas of activities – joint academic initiatives including research and training; consultancy and other technical services; and resource and information sharing.

The partnership was sealed with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Prof Chan for WOU, and UPOU chancellor Prof Dr Melinda dela Peña Bandalaria.

UPOU, established in February 1995, aims to equip learners, especially Filipinos, with the knowledge and skills needed for the digital age.

WOU and UT solidify partnership

Under the *Kampus Merdeka* programme in Indonesia, students may take credits in their own university towards the award of a degree, and fulfil the remaining credits with courses at other universities, whether local or abroad.

This setting offers an ideal opportunity for WOU to undertake student exchange programmes with Universitas Terbuka Indonesia (UT), following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between them.

Doing the honours at the WOU main campus on 12 May 2023 were UT Rector Prof Dr Ojat Darajat and Prof Chan. The witnesses were UT Faculty of Economics and Business dean Dr Meirani Harsasi, and WOU Director of Teaching and Learning Assoc Prof Dr Dewi A Sapuan.

WOU and UT can now consolidate their efforts to advance open distance learning in Southeast Asia.

Further areas of cooperation are faculty exchange, joint research and development projects, academic and training programmes, publication exchange, consultancy and other technical services.

BUILD EDUCATION TALENT ECOSYSTEM TO BOOST PENANG'S ECONOMY

▼ The speakers (from left): Prof Chan, Dr Vaseehar, CK Tan and ET Tan, with the moderator Lai (centre).



A panel of experts advocated the building of a conducive ecosystem in Penang to develop an industry-ready workforce and attract both local and foreign talents. This will help overcome the skills shortage in Penang and boost its economy.

That was the consensus of the speakers at the session on *Education, Talent, Knowledge and Human Capital - Key Success Factors for Penang* during the recent Penang Future Forward Summit 2023.

The panellists were WOU Chief Executive and Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Lily Chan, KSI executive vice chairman Datuk Dr Vaseehar Hassan, NationGate Solution (M) Sdn Bhd vice president (Strategic Business Development) Tan Chin Kong, and Penang Skills Development Centre (PSDC) chief executive officer Tan Eng Tong.

The session was moderated by Penang-Chengdu Friendship Association president Stephen Lai.

The summit was jointly organised by KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific (KSI) and the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI) northern branch. It was attended by more than 300 people comprising representatives from industry, government agencies and higher learning institutions.

CRUCIAL TO HAVE RIGHT TALENTS

Prof Chan shared that Penang aims to attract 150,000 Malaysian knowledge workers in the next five years to ease the state's skills shortage.

"Only 45% of the overall 400,000 SPM students are in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). We must up this percentage to 70% before we can meet the nation's talent needs. Parents play an important role as students must be trained in STEM from young," she said.

She continued, "Education talent must be viewed as an ecosystem issue, comprising of four stakeholders, namely

higher learning institutions, government agencies, industries and companies, and communities."

She called on government agencies, especially the Higher Education Ministry, Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Immigration Department, to work in sync for the implementation of harmonised policies and strategies.

Additionally, universities should work closely with industry and companies to understand their needs and upgrade courses. She wanted to see more activities organised in schools and kindergartens in communities, and for teachers to be trained in digitalisation and education.

SKILLS GAP AND ACTION NEEDED

Dr Vaseehar lamented on the skills gap in the workforce and the poor command of the English language among university students.

He said the zeal to improve Bahasa Malaysia has somehow destroyed the once strong Malaysian education system, and also faulted the "killing" of the missionary schools.

"Today's graduates cannot fit into the job market because of the poor quality of education. The whole education system must now be rebuilt," he added.

CK Tan said that the companies in Penang would require university graduates who are able to use contemporary technological tools for improved work efficiency.

ET Tan encouraged the upskilling of the workforce and bringing in talents into the state. He found that many factories in Penang have advanced technologies and yet many parents are unaware of this development.

"Innovation is the only way forward for Penang to compete, using the same workforce executing higher value tasks. Companies should collectively promote Penang to schools and parents to get more children to pursue STEM," he stressed.

DIGITAL TALENT DEMAND HIGH IN FAST-EVOLVING DIGITAL TECH WORLD

There is market demand for digital entrepreneurs, gig workers and other digital professionals in the fast-evolving digital technology world.

Four digital technology professionals highlighted the increasing digitalisation of businesses and the importance of talent for businesses to grow and reach global levels during a webinar on *Are you Techable?*

They were the head of Digital Entrepreneurship and Gig Workforce at Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), Ts Nurezali Osman, Korn Ferry Malaysia country managing director Anthony Raja Devadoss, Digital Penang chief operating officer Ts Ng Kwang Ming, and NCER Talent & Industry Ecosystem Development senior manager and NCER Technology Innovation Centre (NTIC) head Amir Sharifuddin Nayodin.

EMPOWERING THROUGH TRAINING

Nurezali said MDEC's Digital Entrepreneurship and Gig Workforce training programmes teach individuals, students, and aspiring and existing entrepreneurs how to use digital tools, platforms or apps to promote their business to domestic and global markets via digital marketing and e-commerce.

"MDEC also seeks to train two types of gig workforce - digital freelance and high-value gig - to improve their skills. There are so many platforms out there for service providers. MDEC validates the platforms before we promote them to the freelancers, and then onboard the freelancers to the specific platforms," he added.

Nurezali said freelance services include programmer/coder, mobile applications, content writing and online accounting, while high-value gig work encompasses repair, sales and marketing, content creation, and other skilled work that required certification.

Devadoss said automation and data-based decision-making processes help companies to become globally competitive. "Look at the stackable skills from a training and development perspective, and embrace the short-term courses to bring you to where you want to be," he stressed.

DIGITAL TALENT OUTLOOK IN MALAYSIA

Devadoss also shared a digital talent study in Malaysia that illustrated a demand for talents in such fields as software development, cyber security, user experience, data science, search engine optimisation, digital marketing, social media, e-commerce and web content.

He said the top three sources for recruiting digital talents in Malaysia were LinkedIn, recruitment websites and employee referrals, while the prevalent top digital job functions were cyber security, digital marketing, and business performance

▼ Nurezali shares the MDEC initiatives.



▼ High demand for digital talents, says Devadoss.



▲ Ng highlights the skills demand of MNCs and SMEs.



▲ Amir cites the reasons behind talent shortage.

and process transformation.

Ng said startups, SMEs and MNCs require talents competent in full-stack programming (front-end to back-end development), system engineering (e.g. the setting-up, configuration and deployment of the system), coding, applied analytics and cyber security.

Amir spoke on the highly-skilled talent supply shortage and skills mismatch problems in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), and its impact on efforts to attract investments.

"The supply shortage result from a lack of graduates in STEM and TVET courses, brain drain, self-employment, the gig economy, and a restrictive immigration policy," he said. "The skills mismatch is due to graduates being produced by institutions not meeting industry needs and inadequate upskilling and reskilling opportunities."

He explained that NCER has initiated training programmes to strengthen the talent ecosystem. They include the NCER Talent Enhancement Programme (NTEP) to increase youth and graduates' employability, and the Advanced Technology Meister Programme (ATMP) for upskilling employees.

More than 70 people attended the recent webinar organised by WOU Academy and moderated by WOU's Digital Transformation project manager Banu Devi Subramaniam.

THE GOOD AND BAD OF THE INTERNET



▲ Dr Lalitha talks about cyber safety.



▲ Dr Lalitha and the WOU team with the teachers and students.

The Internet offers many opportunities for learning, communication and entertainment in a borderless global digital age.

Education providers are increasingly adopting the Internet as a valuable learning resource for students as young as preschoolers.

While the Internet offers numerous advantages, it is crucial to recognise the potential dangers that exist online. For students to navigate online platforms safely, they must be taught to identify and avoid the different forms of threats.

WOU's School of Business and Administration (SBA) senior lecturer **Dr Lalitha Ramasamy** presented a talk on *Cyber Safety: Keeping Teenagers and Children Safe Online* at SMK Convent Bukit Mertajam on 2 May 2023.

Speaking to 269 Form Four and Five students, Dr Lalitha shared informative facts through real-life examples and videos that kept her young audience engaged throughout the session.

BEWARE OF CYBERSPACE THREATS

She discussed the various techniques used by cyber criminals to prey on unsuspecting teenagers and children, which included cyber bullying, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, love bombing and pornography. "These youngsters are then lured into revealing personal information, and in some cases, even cajoled into posing for suggestive photographs," she said.

Dr Lalitha also revealed more extreme cybercrimes in the form of online grooming for sexual purposes, sexting, sextortion and virtual rape.

"Often, the victims are too traumatised to discuss the details of their unpleasant experience out of shame and fear of reprisals," she said, adding that many sadly succumb to depression, and, in worst case scenarios, lose their will to live.

As a precaution, she pointed out several red flags to watch out for when communicating with or accepting "friend requests" from strangers online.

"Students should be wary when a person offers excessive compliments, particularly on their physical appearance," she said. They must be vigilant if someone they do not know well starts to ask personal questions or requests private information, such as an address or a phone number.

Other indicators that would set off bells include when the person tries to keep the relationship a secret, asks for revealing photographs or tries to send gifts. A suggestion for a face-to-face meeting is also a warning sign of an unsafe online interaction.

"Always trust your intuition and speak to a trusted adult if you feel uncomfortable in your online interaction," she advised.

TAKE CHARGE

Dr Lalitha reminded students to take immediate action, such as terminating the communication, blocking the perpetrator's access, and documenting all communications that could be used as evidence.

"Not many are aware of the numerous avenues for help provided by the relevant authorities," she said, providing a contact list of governmental and non-governmental organisations that offer support to cybercrime victims.



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TAPPING INTO THE POWER OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing can effectively attract customers if the available technological tools are applied for maximum impact.

Digital marketing specialist **Nimmala Shanmuganathan** gave three features that differentiate traditional marketing from digital marketing.

"In digital marketing, you are driven by a host of evolving technologies that enhance the changes your customers experience and their engagement levels," she said.

"Next, digital marketing is powered by relationships. You have to build a two-way communication with your customers," she stressed. "And thirdly, it is optimised by analytics. You can use data to understand your customers better and subsequently come out with better solutions for them."

Nimmala was speaking at an online talk on *Digital Marketing* organised by the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) on 15 April 2023. It is important for anyone venturing into business to understand the content marketing model because marketing today is mainly content marketing, she highlighted.

She said, "It is now increasingly easy to create content but you must know what you are doing with your content. So, find a balance between what to publish and what customers want. Then create content that is relevant and desirable for the target audience."

There are four main elements to make content effective. "The content must feature an offer, call to action, landing page, and a form," she added.

She inquired, "What exactly do your users get from communicating with you?" She therefore advised, "Have a call to action such as 'Read more', 'Click on a link', 'Find out more' or 'Download the brochure' to get users to engage with your content. Also, you need a landing page or form for them to fill out their details."

CONTENT MARKETING: TYPES AND STRATEGIES

She also discussed the different content types that could be used to achieve specific goals.

They are the video tutorials, success stories and testimonials to promote brand awareness, and newsletters, offer letters and guest blog posts to drive website traffic. Others are product offerings, demonstrations, webinars and contests for generating leads, as well as gifting something of value to increase sign-ups.



▲ Different content types are to be used according to the goals, says Nimmala.

Nimmala shared that video, especially short videos with subtitles, are currently the most popular content type, gaining a very good traction from customers.

She highlighted that the most basic content type is the blog post. "If you create a good blog, it may even be read years after the article is created, to draw readers or leads," she said.

She said marketers could use various platforms such as Google Keyword Planner, Buzzsumo, Portent's Content Idea Generator, and social media listening tools like Talkwalker and Social Mention. These will assist them to find topics that interest people, and to track metrics like downloads, sign-ups and page views.

"Marketing agencies typically follow the 70:20:10 rule for content creation, where 70% is curated from various sources, original content accounts for 20%, and 10% is dedicated to sales and product offerings," she informed.

She said businesses must know their target audience and then tailor their content accordingly. "One common practice is to have a content calendar that includes festive or recurring events, public holidays and special events, with some space for spontaneous events," she added.

WOU offers the digital marketing course for its degree programmes in Sales and Marketing (BBSM), Management (BBMG) and Digital Business (BDBS), and as a micro-credential award.

WOU-GLENEAGLES JOINTLY PROMOTE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Penang State Executive Councillor for Social Development and Non-Islamic Religious Affairs, Chong Eng, urged women to safeguard their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

"Go for annual health checks, embrace a healthy diet. Exercise, spend time with your family, and practise self-care. A healthy body equals a healthy mind," she said.

Speaking at a recent International Women's Day event themed *Healthy and Active Women*, she reminded Malaysian women that breast, cervical and colorectal cancers were among the common cancers.

"It is vital that you seek medical tests regularly for early detection and a higher chance of recovery from the disease," she told about 100 people who attended the event at Gleneagles Hospital Penang. It was jointly organised by WOU, Gleneagles and the State Women and Family Development Committee (JPWK).

YB Chong said the state government provided an important support system through the setting-up of postpartum maternal care centres to look after the mother and infant during confinement.

"Other support services are free health screening at government health clinics, free mammogram and pap smears for early detection of cancer, and healthcare talks," she added.

Hospital chief operating officer Yong Zi Ling echoed the call for women to undergo regular screening tests as "early diagnosis improves cancer outcome".



▲ YB Chong (3rd from right) with part of the organising committee.



▲ A dining scene against the majestic Homestead building.

WOU's scenic seafront was a hive of activity in early March when it was turned into a film set for the shooting of the Malaysian movie, *Nyonya Ronggeng*.

The fictional movie tells the bittersweet story of a ronggeng dancer named Rose who hails from an aristocratic Baba Nyonya background. It chronicles her life – and the Peranakan culture – as she perseveres through tragedies and disappointments.

The majestic Homestead's colonial façade provided the perfect backdrop for the outdoor scenes, while its beautifully embellished interior was re-imagined to reflect the 1940s to 1970s story setting. There were interesting behind-the-scenes snapshots of the production cast and crew in action, as they went about filming within the campus.

The multilingual film – a mix of English, Malay and Hokkien – by ZLK Production Sdn Bhd is set for release by year-end. Movie-goers will get to experience the tradition and culture of the Peranakan community.



▲ Shooting another scene inside the Homestead.

POSTER COMPETITION NURTURES CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN STUDENTS

Twenty-seven final year students from WOU were able to showcase their expertise and creativity at the technology and innovation poster competition (WOUTech '23) organised by the School of Science and Technology (SST).

The participants were all from the Bachelor of Technology (BTech) programmes - 15 from mechatronics (BTME), six from electronics (BTCL), and six from construction management (BTCM).

The competition was held in a hybrid mode, in-person at the WOU main campus and online via MS Team, to evaluate the students' final semester posters. The five-member judging panel comprised the SST academics and two industry experts, Lingkail Sdn Bhd director Dr Leow Cheah Wei and TT Vision Holding Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Goon Koon Yin.

The best poster award was won by BTCL's Terence Leong Chee Meng, best presentation by BTME's Parkashwaran Mahgeshwaran, and best demonstration by BTCL's Ng Jun Cong.

Dr Leow spoke on *RT-Thread and its Applications in Industrial IoT* at the event. He said the lightweight and efficient RT-thread made industrial application well-suited for use in IoT (Internet of Things) devices.

▼ Parkashwaran (right) won for best presentation.



He cited examples of the application of RT-thread in Industrial IoT (IIoT) to control the movement of robotic arms, monitor the temperature of machinery, and control the flow of liquid through pipes.

"RT threads are essential in IIoT systems where precise timing and fast response are critical," he added.



▲ Best demonstration award won by Ng (left).

THAI STUDENTS LEARN ENGLISH THE FUN WAY

Twenty Thai students from Sri Songkram Wittaya School participated in a week-long English language workshop at the WOU main campus recently.

It was organised by WOU's School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences (SEHS) to enhance the English Language skills of the Form Two students.

Six academics from the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in English Studies (BAES) programme conducted the workshop. They carried out a "Get-to-know Malaysia" ice-breaking session followed by practical activities focused on developing good communication skills in the students.

BAES programme lead Arathai Din Eak explained, "Students find hands-on experience and games to be fascinating. So we designed activities that required them to tap into their senses, creativity and technology."

"Mastering the English Language is a must and the most effective way to do so is by using the language daily," SEHS

▼ The Thai students with their certificates.



dean Assoc Prof Dr Thomas Chow told the students.

Wittaya School English teacher Prapatson Iemwieng summed up: "My students learnt not only English but about the Malaysian culture as well. I hope we can collaborate on a similar project for different groups of students next year."

DIGITAL BUSINESS PATHWAY TO EXCELLENT JOB PROSPECTS

Abdul Kader Saifuddin is already a successful digital marketer while still pursuing his second year of study at WOU.

He is one of the many students from the School of Digital Technology (DiGiT) who found themselves employable even before graduating. This is because DiGiT students are exposed to full-time, intensive, skills-centric courses in their first year.

The 30-year-old from Penang enrolled in the Bachelor of Digital Business (Honours) [BDBS] programme in September 2021. He learnt practical digital tools and know-how to create engaging digital content for enhanced customer experience.

Kader works from the comfort of his home, but communicates often with his boss and clients. "I need motivation, self-governance and discipline to complete projects on time. I liaise with clients if I face problems or need assets, like a company logo or product image," he explained.

He likes digital marketing because it is a creative field, and yet data-based. "It is very results-driven. You can experiment and be creative, but at the end of the day, you must measure whether it is bringing results," he added.

He said a career in digital marketing should appeal to those not keen of a 9-5 job and wanted to pursue their passion. He advised, "Start simple like blogging about your passion, and slowly develop your brand."



"I have a globalised client base ... Best of all, I get paid in foreign currency."

Kader is currently handling digital marketing projects for three clients. For him, digital marketing is basically communicating a company's values and principles, developing its brand, and communicating its product or service.

His work for Swissaire, a Switzerland-based ergonomics company, is to create and enhance their blog and social media posts. He creates content marketing for SB Acoustics, a Denmark-based company dealing in high-end audio, and Enso Consult, a Singapore-based consulting firm specialising in branding and digital business solution.

Kader pointed out: "I have a globalised client base. With digital marketing, and with digital-based workflows, I can get clients globally by communicating well and showing what I can do."

"Best of all, I get paid in foreign currency," he emphasised.

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