

# AeU's industry-relevant ICT programmes

> Long-term vision allows realistic goals in terms of graduate outcome

BY YEE JIE MIN

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**T**HE challenge for academics has always been to produce quality graduates. Some institutions filter their students at entry point to ensure this is possible; some ensure they have an education system in place that can "turn stones into gems".

If you are able to transform them, then it is the institution's success, says Asia e University (AeU) School of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) dean Prof Dr Syed Malek Fakar Duani.

"To have an effective education framework, we have revised our structure in a systematic way where we prepare the material by looking at the product five years down the road. From this long term vision, we can look at what kind of outcome a graduate should have.

"Even if the framework looks good, another challenge is to have an effective implementation. The person who implements it must understand and apply it accordingly. If the assessment doesn't address the outcome we expect then it is not effective.

"For example, someone pursuing a programme in Internet Marketing Technology should have his own e-business. I designed this programme for the graduate

to become an entrepreneur, but if he ends up being a normal worker, that is a failure for us," he adds.

"Another challenge is nothing new and that is to match industry needs, skills and knowledge to the student. In the process of developing the programme, we engage with industry and they provide us feedback. This has become a common practice," Syed Malek says.

"We have to have a close relationship with industry so that we can revise and revamp to match with the new developments in the industry. However, changing syllabus is not easy, unlike in the west where any changes are up to you once the programme is approved. They have that independent empowerment by the authority.

"The demands of the IT industry vary. Different

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Syed Malek says future leaders must be able to visualise how ICT can be used to get more business.



industries have different demands and to meet all the demands is impossible but we do go about addressing the issues.

"We have introduced work-based learning to some of our programmes. (This model) allows students to be parked in the industry that we have an agreement with.

"What the student does with the particular company will match the course they take and this gets them exposed to the industry. They get to understand the business, its core values and culture at an early stage. This is one of the solutions to meet industry needs," Syed Malek says.

"This model is only for undergraduate programmes. At the Masters level, as most of our students are adult learners, we design the programme for those at the managerial level. We don't give hardcore fundamentals on ICT but focus on management skills.

"For example, in a course on ICT Strategic Planning, many corporate leaders use ICT to support their business vision. But using ICT as a weapon to get more business is different. We have to prepare students to be future corporate leaders who can visualise how ICT can be



The university "by Asians for Asia" ensures its courses are relevant for the real world.

innovated to tap more business and not just use it as a supporting tool," he says.

"In building a programme, you must first know who it is meant for, and second, the material used has to be related to the industry.

"There should be feedback from students of how the programme is relevant to their workplace as well as frequent talks between the academics and industry on an individual and roundtable level," Syed Malek adds.

A prime mover in online education in Asia, AeU collaborates with global educational institutions to offer quality, affordable and marketable programmes through e-learning. Its programmes have attracted high numbers of postgraduates from around the world.