

Sparking interest in science

STARTING THEM

YOUNG: Workshops, presentations for exposure towards science

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SCIENCE, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-related fields makes up for less than 3 per cent of the workforce in Malaysia compared to 30 per cent in economic giants such as the United States, Japan, Germany and Singapore, said Higher Education deputy minister Datuk Mary Yap in her speech at the opening of UCSI University's (UCSI) Applied Science Week (ASW) last week.

Yap said there is a growing concern that Malaysian youth's interest in these fields are declining.

"To drive Malaysia's growth, homegrown talents and human capital in STEM are an absolute necessity.

"The country may soon experience a serious human capital shortage in science if the number of students enrolled in STEM courses does not meet its annual expected standards," she added.

"Education fuels the development in science and technology which are fundamentally altering the way people live, connect, communicate and transact, with profound effects on economic development.

"They are the key drivers to development because technological and scientific revolutions underpin economic advances, improvements in health systems, infrastructure as well as education.

She added that it is encouraging

that UCSI has gone one step further in sharpening the minds of the younger generation.

"The ministry cannot combat this without working together with our country's education institutions. Universities' role today does not stop at offering youths the knowledge and the skills they will need to enter the workforce, it exceeds far beyond to spark the young people's appetites for science," she said.

Themed "The Science, The Experience & U", ASW in its 4th year showcased its students' innovative creations and engage the community to regenerate enthusiasm towards the fields of STEM.

It also served as a platform for UCSI students to present their research work and test their credibility in conducting research as well as enhance their public speaking skills.

The two-day event highlighted a range of activities involving the fields of food science, biotechnology, nutrition and aquatic science.

Food science students showcased their formulated food or beverage products with commercial potential whereas aquatic science students demonstrated the concepts of aquaponics and aquascaping.

Various workshops were also held for students from several secondary schools in the Klang Valley to introduce to them the importance of nutrition, biotechnology and microbiology.

Held annually since 2007, the event was renamed after the faculty, after the biotechnology programme

students took part along with the food science and nutrition students in 2012.

Profits generated from the event was channeled to Yayasan Sunbeams Home in Cheras.

UCSI University president and vice-chancellor Senior Professor Datuk Dr Khalid Yusoff in his speech

said the Applied Science Week provided an opportunity to the public and the secondary school students to discover potential talent and regenerate enthusiasm towards science.

"Just as important in our pursuit of knowledge, is our capacity to care for our society. Through this annual event, our students highlighted the global issue of food security and the benefits of zero-waste food packaging as well as raising awareness towards our local orphanage — Yayasan Sunbeams Home. It is heartening to see our future leaders care for our community and the development of our country as a whole," he said.

His speech was read by the university's Academic Affairs and Support deputy vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Zainuddin.

Several science workshops were held throughout the event which exposed participants to some of the fast-developing fields of applied sciences — microbiology and nutrition — while enabling them to have fun at the same time.

Present were the Faculty of Applied Sciences dean Associate Professor Dr Bimo Ario Tejo and organising chairman Assistant Professor Dr Lionel In.



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Datuk Mary Yap,
Higher Education deputy minister



Visitors at one of the participating booths.



Datuk Mary Yap (second from right) and **Professor Datuk Dr Ahmad Zainuddin** listening to a student's briefing at one of the booths during the launch of the Applied Science Week.