

Igniting Innovation at UMK's new Ignite Venture Innovation Lab

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Standfirst <If the US has the Silicon Valley and the UK the Cambridge Cluster, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) aspires to transform Kota Bharu, Kelantan into a knowledge valley for innovation-driven entrepreneurship.>

6km from Kota Bharu, the capital city of Kelantan, and about 5 minutes' drive from Sultan Ismail Petra Airport is a knowledge valley where young people from across the country engage, collaborate and innovate to solve real-world problems.

This is Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK), the top entrepreneurial university in Malaysia. As of June 2021, the university has 1,551 active student entrepreneurs and 845 registered student companies. Based on the tracer study conducted by MOHE (Ministry of Higher Education), UMK has produced 13% and 14.8% graduate entrepreneurs, the highest in Malaysia compared to the national average of 4.6%, and boasts a graduate employability rate of over 90% from its graduating class of 2019 and 2020 respectively.

UMK's brand as a leading entrepreneurship education hub is also increasingly recognised - UMK was recently appointed to lead national collaboration efforts to develop the MOHE Guide to Entrepreneurship Integrated Education (EIE), which was launched by the Honourable Minister of Higher Education.

Strategic thinking and meticulous execution are the keys to UMK's achievements. UMK is consciously planned as an inspiring environment and innovation hub where students and faculties collaborate to create value and innovate. The university is deliberately situated within a dynamic and thriving business district populated by enterprises of all shapes and sizes: retail outlets, manufacturing companies, transportation providers, restaurants and more. All the way from the entrance gate of the university's city campus right up to the academic areas, student-managed food carts and restaurants line the streets. While their physical business activities have since slowed down due to the pandemic, their online businesses are gaining traction. Recent statistics show that an increasing number of students are engaging in online and gig economy activities.

Once inside the campus, the university's innovation-oriented structure and ecosystem for delivering entrepreneurship education are immediately visible. Apart from the nine academic faculties and four centers specialising in entrepreneurship, the umbrella UMK Entrepreneurship Institute (UMKEI) coordinates three important units: the Center for Entrepreneurship Education and Development (CEED), Institute for Small and Medium Enterprises (ISME), and Global Entrepreneurship Research and Innovation Center (GERIC). They focus on entrepreneurship education, upskilling and reskilling SMEs, and innovation.

In line with the global thrust towards digital economy and to equip faculties and students for Future Work, UMK has established the Institute for Artificial Intelligence and Big Data (AIBIG) focusing on research and industrial collaborations in IR 4.0 knowledge and skills. AIBIG works closely with the Department of Data Science, which offers the Bachelor of Information Technology. At the Bachok campus, the Creative Entrepreneur Accelerator Centre (CEAC) actively nurtures students to engage in value-driven gig economy

activities. UMK has also invested in food sufficiency and agricultural sustainability and innovation efforts through the Jeli Food Farm Valley (JFFV) and Innovation and Entrepreneurship Incubator Complex (IEIC) at its Jeli Campus, two hours' drive from Kota Bharu.

Shifting Gears: Escalating Towards Innovation-Driven Entrepreneurship

While UMK has successfully inculcated entrepreneurship culture and behaviour among its students, the next step is to embed innovation-driven entrepreneurship. In a volatile and uncertain business landscape rife with disruption, young entrepreneurs need to be agile and inventive. Thinking holistically, they need to be able to leverage and integrate emerging technologies to deliver quantum value and scale proven solutions.

To this end, UMK has recently established Ignite Venture Innovation Lab, a first-of-its-kind campus-based technology startup incubation and acceleration hub in Malaysia. Here, the Ignite Lab, together with AIBIG, works with several technology entrepreneurs from around the world to train students and faculties on how to leverage on emerging technologies like AI, VR, Blockchain, IoTs, Cloud Computing and Big Data Analytics to innovate and solve real-world problems. The Lab adopts Microsoft Certified 21st Century Learning Design (21CLD) to equip students with IR 4.0 skills, such as real-world problem solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration/shared responsibility, critical thinking, skilled communication, and responsible application of digital tools for learning and living.

The Lab's aspirations are in line with key development goals of Malaysia, as encapsulated in:

- The *Twelfth Malaysia Plan* (harnessing the 4th Industrial Revolution),
- *Shared Prosperity Vision 2030* (Key Economic Growth Activity),
- *Framing Malaysia Higher Education 4.0* (adapting to the changing demands of 4IR),
- *National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030* (high growth and innovation-driven enterprise), and
- The recently launched *Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint* and *National 4IR Policy* that target Malaysia as an Innovation Country by 2030.

The vision of UMK Ignite Venture Lab is also in sync with the recently launched Festival of Ideas, a MOHE initiative to stimulate creativity and innovation in the academic community. The Festival aims to implement ideas that, in the words of the Honourable Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad, "address challenges faced by our nation".

Current and Future Activities, Impacts and Partnerships

Over the next 5 years, Ignite Venture Lab aims to incubate several high-growth tech enterprises. Over the same period, more than 10,000 UMK students would have participated in the innovation capacity-building activities of the Lab. These skills will enable them to manage their own profitable businesses or engage in value-added high-paying jobs that characterise the innovation economy.

Barely 3 months since it was set up, the Lab has coached over 150 students on New Technology Venture Creation. A total of 120 of these students (or 27 teams) qualified for the Idea Camp stage of the Malaysian Global Innovation and Creativity Centre or MAGIC University Startup Challenge (USC). With the guidance of the Lab, 5 of these teams (30 students) have made it to the Semi-Final Stage of the USC Programme and are currently being mentored by the Lab to win the competition.

Demonstrating their belief and confidence in the Lab's vision, several local and international organisations have agreed to collaborate with and support the Lab. These include MAGIC, the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), InnoThink Advisory (Malaysia), Microsoft, The Garage at Northwestern University (Chicago, US), Clay Christensen Institute (Boston, US), EnCube Labs (India), and Ventures Platform (Nigeria).

Championing Innovative Entrepreneurship for a Sustainable Nation

Eventually, Malaysia Beyond 2020 expects to be a hub for innovation and knowledge-driven economy. This is critical to produce the next generation of future-relevant entrepreneurs and business leaders who are tasked to create quality jobs at home, while supporting the nation's global competitiveness and envisioned high-income status. Central to the realisation of this goal is quality entrepreneurship education, delivered through an effective new model of entrepreneurship education that is hands-on, informal, and focused on solving real-world problems using digital technologies. This is what UMK is championing with its new Ignite Venture Innovation Lab.