

Staying ahead of the competition

University programme helps SMEs stay relevant in their field despite various challenges

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SMALL and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to continue to innovate to stay relevant in today's fast changing economic landscape.

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) research and graduate studies deputy dean Assoc Prof Dr Azmawani Abd Rahman said one of the ways is for the owners to stay updated on trends to learn new skills and techniques that are relevant to their field.

"Many business owners have not gone through structured development programmes as they are too busy with the day-to-day operations of their businesses.

"This programme is to help bridge that gap," she said after the graduation ceremony for SME@UPM 2016 held at the university in Serdang recently.

The programme was held with partners SME Corp and the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF), and patterned after a development programme for SMEs from a Japanese education institution where it offered various training programmes to business executives and managers of SMEs in Japan.

Although the recent batch – which included 21 people ranging from managing directors to chief executive officers – took three months of weekend classes in the university, Azmawani said there were also industrial visits this year; they visited companies in South Korea and government agencies.

"Participants had the opportunity to interact with the SMEs there and learn their best practices.

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Assoc Prof Dr Azmawani Abd Rahman

"South Korea is not a resource-rich country hence their human capital plays a big role in spurring innovation," she said, adding that many of the startups there were utilising 3D printing and nanotechnology.

Contrary to popular belief, she said the classes, which were conducted in English with nine modules with one of the modules fully developed by UPM, were very much interactive and required the learners' active participation.

"They have to go through case studies and brainstorming sessions as well as present their strategies," she said.

Many of these cases used real-life examples where participants were able to better understand what other companies go through and the challenges they face in the global environment.

Azmawani added it was a very good opportunity for the SMEs – which came from diverse industries including food manufac-



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turing and logistics – to learn from one another as different fields faced different opportunities and challenges.

"Some even spoke about potential joint-ventures in the future," she said.

Although the programme has been organised since 2011, this year was the first time where participants were required to have

gone through SME Corp's SME Competitiveness Rating for Enhancement, also known as SCORE.

"This is to ensure the companies are prepared for export and for us to provide relevant information that could help in their growth," she said, adding that the next programme would commence in May next year.