BUILDING DATA EXPERTS OF THE FUTURE
Bright future for data scientists

AN article that appeared in Forbes in May 2018 revealed that around 2.5 quintillion bytes of data were being generated daily. If you were to place all the data on Blu-ray discs and stack them up, the height of the discs would be four times the height of the Eiffel Tower.

Clearly, there is a lot of data available, and we need to be able to make sense of it all. This is where data science comes into its own.

Global management consulting firm Bain & Company, in a 2013 article, mentioned that “Examining more than 400 large companies, we found that those with the most advanced analytics capabilities are outperforming competitors by wide margins”. It is no wonder that data science has been proclaimed “the sexiest job of the 21st century” in an article by Harvard Business Review.

“The World Economic Forum estimates that while 75 million exist, there is an increasing demand for data professionals who are able to decipher all the data in order to create value for organisations, economies or nations,” explained Heriot-Watt University Malaysia provost and chief executive officer Prof Mushtak Al-Atabi.

Data scientists are, first and foremost, problem solvers. Future data scientists should possess a strong interest in mathematics, statistics and computer programming skills.

Some additional traits that will help them in this career are curiosity and good analytical skills.

According to Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC), universities are now even embedding Data Analytics into degrees such as Accounting, Business, Education, Pharmacy, Medical Biotechnology, Dietetics with Nutrition and many others. The applications of data science are vast indeed.

Heriot-Watt University Malaysia currently offers students a chance to pursue their dream of becoming data scientists with its BSc (Hons) Statistical Data Science programme. This programme is run by the university’s School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences.

According to Prof Mushutak (front, right), the Data Futures Scholarship is one way that the university is supporting the government’s efforts in establishing a substantial talent pool to meet the demands of the data science ecosystem.

The BSc (Hons) Statistical Data Science is a three-year programme that is accredited by the Royal Statistical Society (UK), one of the world’s most distinguished and renowned statistical societies.

Additionally, students will have the opportunity to receive up to 40% Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (IFoA) exemptions.

Scholarship programme

In support of the Malaysian government’s endeavours to increase the nation’s pool of data professionals in coming years, Heriot-Watt University Malaysia, in collaboration with three industry players, i.e. Experian, PWC Coatings Sdn Bhd and Fusionex International, launched the Data Futures Scholarship, a three-year scholarship programme collectively worth RM2.6 million, on June 28.

Strongly supported by MDEC and the Department of International Trade, British High Commission, the scholarship programme targets high-achieving and deserving students interested in pursuing Heriot-Watt University Malaysia’s BSc (Hons) Statistical Data Science.

Industry-relevant curricula

“Heriot-Watt has a solid reputation in the fields of data science and artificial intelligence. This, coupled with our strong collaboration with industry, has allowed us to produce industry-relevant curricula as well as graduates,” said Prof Mushutak.

Offering 100% and 50% fee waivers, the scholarship programme will be available beginning from the university’s September 2019 intake.

To be eligible, students need to achieve a minimum of two As and one B with an A in Mathematics in their A-Levels or STPM.

“Those who may be unable to continue their education due to a lack of funds or other factors. This is a great boost for local tech talent development,” said Gobind.

■ To find out more about Heriot-Watt University Malaysia’s BSc (Hons) Statistical Data Science and Data Futures Scholarship programme, or other programmes and scholarships on offer, visit its Open Days on July 20 and 21, or during consultation hours from 9am to 5pm on Mondays to Fridays, and 10am to 4pm on Saturdays. Alternatively, log on to www.hw.edu.my or call 03-8894 3888/e-mail hwum@hw.ac.uk.

Gobind (fourth from right), was on hand to witness the launch of the Heriot-Watt Data Futures Scholarship programme.