

# Interview with Professor Alan Lau Kin Tak, President of THEi: Working full steam ahead to develop THEi into a University of Applied Sciences (UAS) and contribute to Hong Kong's development to become an international hub for post-secondary education



Professor Lau is a graduate of the first cohort of Chai Wan Technical Institute. He has been recognised as one of the “world’s top 0.1% scientist” in the “2023 updated science-wide author databases of standardised citation indicators” compiled by Stanford University. Professor Lau is a great example of success in VPET.

As announced in the Government’s Policy Address last year, the Government would facilitate the establishment of Universities of Applied Sciences (UASs) to provide paths to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in the technical professions and instill in students, parents and the community better appreciation of the importance of vocational and professional education and training (VPET). VTC welcomes the Government’s initiative and Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (THEi), a VTC’s member institution, is working full steam towards becoming a UAS.

Professor Alan Lau, Kin Tak, President of THEi, believes that UAS is a global trend in educational development. Professor Lau stated, "Employers have a high demand for technically skilled professionals with strong hands-on abilities. UAS focuses on cultivating students' applied abilities, providing them with numerous opportunities for practical experience. Students gain an understanding of how their knowledge is practically applied in the industry, enabling them to quickly adapt to the workplace upon entering their careers. This teaching model helps enhance students' interest in learning, making it easier for them to grasp even complex subjects, resulting in greater efficiency." Professor Lau further emphasised that the establishment of UAS in Hong Kong would contribute to talent development in various professional fields, filling the talent gap and injecting momentum into Hong Kong's development.

## Strengthens institutional capabilities: advancing full speed towards UAS

Since its establishment in 2012, THEi has been committed to offering Applied Science-oriented degree programmes, including two Applied Degrees that were part of the Pilot Project on the Development of Applied Degree Programmes by the HKSAR Government. With the programmes offered and tailored to meet the talent demand, THEi graduates are well-received and impress employers. Professor Lau stated, "THEi has accumulated extensive experience in cultivating applied technical talents and is actively preparing to apply for university and UAS status. THEi will continue to collaborate with the industry to ensure that students grasp the latest industry technologies and advancements. Additionally, THEi will provide students with more opportunities for broadening their horizons through exchanges and learning experiences, further enhancing the quality of education." At the present stage, THEi has been undergoing Programme Area Accreditation (PAA) for the Sports and Recreation Management, and will further undergo PAA for the Built Environment as well as the Computer Science and Information Technology. Additionally, THEi will launch a master's degree programme in applied-sciences in collaboration with overseas universities. Furthermore, preparations are being made to offer doctoral degree programmes in the future, providing a pathway for VPET students to attain higher academic qualifications.



THEi is committed to developing students' global perspectives and enriching their learning experiences. Recently, graduates from the Fashion Design programme are invited to attend an international fashion expo in Vietnam, where they have the opportunity to learn from fashion experts abroad and share their insights on the development of the fashion industry.

## Strong focus on industry connections: cultivating applied talents

Professor Lau highlights THEi's clear positioning and extensive industry network, enabling a deep understanding of industry developments and demands. THEi is dedicated to the development of six major academic fields: Product and Fashion Designs, Sports and International Events Management, Digital Construction and Building Services, Horticulture, Arboriculture and Landscape Management, Chinese Medicine and Food Science, and Hotel Management and Culinary Arts and Technology. The Institute particularly emphasises the cultivation of students' practical application abilities, with all students required to complete Work-Integrated Learning training, and specific programme offers up to 720 hours of internship experience. "Students at THEi have ample opportunities to participate in industry projects during their studies, paving the way for their future careers. Professor Lau cites the example of "STARS Academy," wherein some of the stage costumes were created by students from THEi's Fashion Design programme. Furthermore, students from the Sports and Recreation Management programme at THEi provide sports therapy services for some major sporting events in Hong Kong. Additionally, several researches in the field of Chinese Medicine and Food Science have advanced to clinical trial stage in the mainland. Professor Lau further notes that THEi students possess extensive practical experience, making them highly sought after by employers upon graduation.



THEi works closely with industries and places a strong emphasis on practical application for students. Recently, THEi partners with Bar Pacific, providing students with the opportunity to learn firsthand about restaurant operations, from market research, cost calculation, menu design to promotions, which proves to be highly beneficial for them.

## Building reputation and contributing to the national talent development

After over a decade of development, THEi has nurtured numerous young talents for the industry, and its collaborative applied research with the industry has yielded fruitful results. Professor Lau mentioned that many institutions in the mainland are interested in collaborating with THEi, and the Institute is currently engaged in in-depth discussions with the industry regarding the establishment of the new degree programmes to meet industry manpower needs. He believes that THEi's development on becoming a UAS will be a significant milestone. In the long run, he hopes that THEi will become one of the key UASs in the region. He also hopes that THEi would be able to establish closer campuses in the mainland, fostering closer partnerships and sharing experiences in offering applied degree programmes with its mainland counterparts, with a view to contributing to the cultivation of more outstanding talents for the nation, exemplifying the unique value of VPET.



THEi is dedicated to the development of six major academic fields, in which students from the Sports and Recreation Management programme under the Sports and International Events Management area have the opportunity to provide sports therapy services for major sporting events in Hong Kong or have participated in sports event planning, offering them ample practical experience.