

**For Immediate Release****Education Development Center, in partnership with J.P. Morgan, Launch Workforce Readiness Program in ASEAN to Address Skills Challenges Identified by Singapore Management University**

*The program will focus on closing the skills gap in the technical and vocational field in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines*

**November 1, 2016** – Global nonprofit research and development organization Education Development Center (EDC), in partnership with J.P. Morgan, today launched an innovative program to help young people in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) gain the technical and employability skills that employers are demanding in the region’s dynamic digital economy.

The program was developed as a direct result of a year-long study conducted by the Singapore Management University (SMU) in association with J.P. Morgan, on the skills challenges faced by the ASEAN economies of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

The comprehensive study, also released today, found a consistent shortage of industry-ready workers with relevant technical and vocational skills across the region, particularly in the information and communications technology sector (ICT). This is in part due to curriculum development and available courses not keeping pace with the demands of ICT, which is a relatively new and rapidly-changing industry.

The study revealed that education and training institutions, at different levels, were falling short of equipping graduates with the necessary skillsets demanded by industries. In Malaysia, for instance, only 10 percent of new entrants to the ICT sector are employable, with the remaining 90 percent requiring substantial training before they are work-ready.

Youth unemployment also emerged as a challenge in countries like Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia, where the jobless rate in this group far exceeds the national average. Poor soft skills, especially the low level of English proficiency in Thailand and Indonesia, were also cited as a factor for concern.

“ASEAN countries are facing serious labor skills problems as they undergo economic transformations. The study is aimed at assessing the skills demand as well as informing policy debates as governments in the region formulate their policies for the next phase of economic development. The five ASEAN economies are important drivers of growth in Asia Pacific, and if they want their economic growth to remain robust and sustainable, they must overcome their skills challenges,” said Arnoud De Meyer, President, SMU.

As a result of the study’s findings, J.P. Morgan and EDC have created a program aimed at empowering the youth in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, by providing them with the opportunity to learn the necessary work skills that are needed by high-growth tech-related sectors.

The Accelerated Work Achievement and Readiness for Employment 2 (AWARE2) project, which builds on a previous partnership program between J.P. Morgan and EDC, is a three-year initiative that targets the secondary-level technical and vocational field. Core elements of the program include establishing and improving practical relationships between technical and vocational education and training (TVET) schools, local businesses, and government to create a more market-driven TVET system. EDC will also develop a new digital platform to share best practices, industry needs and student portfolios.

“J.P. Morgan’s partnerships with SMU and EDC to identify and meet the skills challenges in the region are testament to the firm’s engagement in ensuring that underprivileged youth have an opportunity to thrive at this crucial stage in ASEAN’s expansionary development,” said Kalpana Morparia, J.P. Morgan’s Senior Country Officer for South and South East Asia. “J.P Morgan has been in ASEAN for more than 50 years and as a firm we have never been more committed to supporting economic growth and inclusion in these markets.”

The program will focus on helping young people develop analytical and soft skills, such as leadership, teamwork, and communication, alongside technical skills. Students will spend a minimum of 160 learning hours in the classroom, utilizing EDC’s highly regarded Work Ready Now curriculum, in addition to vocational work placements to promote on-the-job learning.

“EDC’s goal is to develop a new model for demand-driven education that will prepare ASEAN youth for lifelong careers in the digital economy,” said David Offensend, EDC President and CEO. “We know that technology will create new jobs as well as replace them through automation. By preparing students with higher-level cognitive skills such as creativity, design thinking and applied analysis and problem solving we can ensure they will have the adaptive ability to anticipate and respond to the shifts in demand in the evolving technology sector.”

The program core of aligning education and training with the skills that employers demand will be consistent across three countries, with solutions tailored according to specific needs of each market. In Indonesia, for example, the focus is on expanding employer engagement with the education sector for more and better ICT entry-level hires, specializing in multimedia and graphic design programs in partner TVET schools.

In the Philippines, in partnership with the Regional Directors for Cebu and the National Capital Region and industry partner Globe Telecom, the program will focus on foundational IT skills, including systems engineering. In Thailand, the program will include work with the AmCham Thailand’s ICT Committee and the Director of the Thai Institute of Vocational Education to adapt the curriculum with a focus on app development and jewellery design.

The SMU and EDC partnerships are part of JPMorgan Chase Foundation’s News Skills at Work initiative – a \$250 million, five-year global workforce development program launched in 2013 –

and its recently launched \$75 million five-year global New Skills for Youth program, which aims to support youth employment.

“At the core of our role at J.P. Morgan is helping industry grow and enabling economic development. We are committed to ensuring that the communities where we live and work can create new pathways to economic opportunity. We believe that expanding understanding of issues that affect the workforce and helping people gain the skills they need to compete for well-paying jobs in growing industries are core elements to creating growth,” said Chauncy Lennon, head of workforce initiatives at J.P. Morgan.

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**About Singapore Management University**

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its high-impact multi-disciplinary research that addresses Asian issues of global relevance, and for its innovations in experiential learning. With 9,300 students, SMU offers bachelors, masters and PhD degree programmes in Accountancy, Business, Economics, Information Systems, Law and Social Sciences, and executive development programmes. Through its city campus, SMU enjoys strategic linkages with business, government and the wider community in Singapore and beyond. [www.smu.edu.sg](http://www.smu.edu.sg)

**About Education Development Center**

EDC is a global nonprofit organization that designs, implements, and evaluates programs to improve education, health, and economic opportunity worldwide. Collaborating with both public and private partners, we strive for a world where all people are empowered to live healthy, productive lives. Visit [www.edc.org](http://www.edc.org).