Why is adult education important?
Prof Ting Seng Kiong — Adult education is something I would say is inevitable—we need to know enough to cope with technology-driven change. It is about reaching out to people who are already out of school, and teaching them to cope with changes that will have an impact on them.

But what level of education is appropriate for each individual? In the past, everyone just took courses, and sometimes there was a mismatch between the level of the course and the individual’s level of understanding.

Now, with SkillsFuture getting the institutes of higher learning involved, the process is more structured and streamlined. Each individual can easily choose the course level that is most appropriate for them.

What future challenges will we face in terms of career development?
Prof Ting — The main challenge we will face is the uncertainty of technology’s impact on us. Nobody can predict upcoming trends—for example, how soon would driverless vehicles become pervasive?

In the face of such uncertainty, I say we should take all the information that we have and do the best that we can. In the past, things were more predictable: you attend university, graduate and work in the same job until you retire. Today, people are surprised if you stay at a company for more than five years. Our world now provides us with many choices, and we should be mentally prepared to cope with change as and when it happens.

Hence, we should be prepared to learn something different whenever necessary. It may not lead to a degree, but it will help us be much more useful to a company than a university graduate who specialises only in one particular area. At the end of the day, we have to ask which is more valuable to companies: paper qualifications or the relevant skill set and experience?

Some of our alumni are business owners. How might these employers benefit from encouraging their staff to pursue continuing education at PaCE?
Prof Ting — For alumni employers, one benefit would be that they are already familiar with the quality of education that NTU offers, and they can be assured that their staff will be receiving good training.

The other advantage is that we are trying to create a market-sensing feedback loop. We usually get feedback on what courses we should offer from government agencies and from industries we are familiar with. But we also want to talk to our alumni employers, who could potentially tell us about positions they find hard to fill, and about the skill sets required for these positions. Such feedback allow us to get a better sense of the market.

What would you say to alumni to encourage them to pursue lifelong learning?
Prof Ting — Enjoy learning; do not fear it. If we take things a step at a time, the learning process becomes less frightening. What is frightening is closing the door and shutting out ideas. By the time you find yourself with no choice but to embark on learning a new skill, you will be under pressure to absorb many new things, and the environment may not be ideal. Do not wait for such a situation to occur—learning should be a part of life.