NIE, Amazon Web Services set up tech education centre in NTU to boost trainee teachers' skills

Krist Boo
Senior Business Correspondent

Trainee teachers, students and staff at the National Institute of Education (NIE) can get direct access to artificial intelligence (AI) and cloud technology from industry giant Amazon Web Services (AWS).

The institute has joined forces with AWS to set up a Technology for Education Centre at its Nanyang Technological University campus.

Their three-year memorandum of understanding (MOU) was announced at the May 29 AWS Summit held at Marina Bay Sands, which drew more than 5,000 attendees.

NIE hopes the collaboration – the first for the 75-year-old institute with an industry player – will be the start of more such links so that student teachers will be better equipped in AI and cloud skills.

NIE director Liu Woon Chia told a briefing that students will be mentored by both faculty and AWS specialists to apply AI to the real world, such as designing tools for students with special needs.

The tech centre, which will be housed temporarily in a converted classroom when the new term starts in August, will eventually have its own premises in a new annex building.

AWS training programmes will be included in the curriculum, with students earning credits on completion. There are also plans to co-host hackathons, hands-on workshops and student-led forums to discuss ethical AI in education.

Professor Liu said the centre is "going to be a space where students, faculty or staff can come in and say, 'Hey, I've got this problem in education that I think we should have a better solution. Now, let's discuss and talk to AWS experts'".

More than 1,000 students graduate from NIE each year and go on to teach in Singapore schools. It also enrols master and doctoral degree students.

AWS also announced at the conference details about its AI Spring Singapore programme, which it launched in 2024 to support Singapore's AI blueprint.

The US company, which has operated here for 15 years, has pledged investments and support for the public sector, local workforce, enterprises and start-ups, community and research.

Its programme activities over the past year include hosting a sandbox environment for Synapxe, Singapore's national health technology agency; providing computing and AI resources to Temasek Polytechnic; and working with AI Singapore to create the Asean Large Language Model League competition.

The tech firm, which recorded revenue of US$107 billion (S$138 billion) in 2024, is the world's largest hyperscaler, or large-scale cloud service provider, with an almost one-third share of the market.

At the summit, Mr Adrien Desbaillets, chief executive of food chain SaladStop!, demonstrated its AWS-hosted AI assistant LuLu, which it plans to launch in September.

The conversational voice bot combines data of popular ingredient pairings, menu availability, customer order history and real-time requests to personalise a salad bowl recommendation. It also lists the meal's carbohydrate, healthy fat and protein amounts.

When a customer says she does not like edamame, the bot will suggest replacing the green bean with tofu, adding that there is no drop in protein value.

SaladStop! plans to go beyond its stores to sell its food directly to organisations such as hospitals and fitness centres.

Mr Desbaillets said: "For us, the chatbot experience is incredible. We believe it could be so much bigger than our 80 outlets today. We can really take things to a whole new level."

kristb@sph.com.sg

National Institute of Education director Liu Woon Chia (left) and AWS Worldwide Public Sector Singapore country manager Elsie Tan signed the three-year memorandum of understanding on May 26. PHOTO: AWS