

PRESS RELEASE

ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarships 2025 Open to Empower Women to Lead in STEM

ASEAN-UK SAGE is the UK's flagship education programme in Southeast Asia, supporting girls and marginalised communities to access education and improve foundational learning.

MANILA, 18 FEBRUARY: On the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, the UK in collaboration with ASEAN Secretariat opened applications for the second year of Women in STEM Scholarships under the ASEAN-UK Supporting the Advancement of Girls' Education (ASEAN-UK SAGE) programme. This initiative reaffirms the UK's commitment to empowering women in Southeast Asia and Timor-Leste to overcome barriers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), enabling more women to lead in these fields.

This fully funded scholarship programme offers 11 exceptional women from 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) and Timor-Leste the opportunity to pursue Master's degrees at two of the UK's leading universities: The University of Warwick and The University of Manchester. The ASEAN-UK SAGE offer complements the British Council Scholarships for Women in STEM also launched today.

In AMS, there is a mixed picture of gender parity in access and performance in STEM subjects. Despite outperforming boys in mathematics and science in primary and secondary education, but women remain underrepresented in STEM in tertiary education for only 19.3% women compared to 39.8% men obtain STEM degrees¹. Women doctoral degree students are a minority². According to UNESCO, women account for a minority of the world's researchers³. In 2019, fewer than 30% of researchers worldwide were women and only 30% of female students select STEM-related fields in higher education⁴. Specifically for East Asia and the Pacific, women researchers accounted for 25%⁵.

This disparity continues into the workforce, with the 2022 UN progress report on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, Gender Equality, indicating that only 20% of jobs in STEM sector are held by women globally and only 16.5% women inventors are associated with a patent⁶.

ASEAN-UK SAGE Programme tackles gender barriers to basic digital skills for employment, aiming to support the development of basic digital skills for marginalised groups to improve employment

¹ <https://uploads.mwp.mprod.getusinfo.com/uploads/sites/62/2023/03/WOMEN-IN-STEM-Infographic-USAID-ASEAN.pdf>

² <https://uploads.mwp.mprod.getusinfo.com/uploads/sites/62/2023/03/WOMEN-IN-STEM-Infographic-USAID-ASEAN.pdf>

³ <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs60-women-in-science-2020-en.pdf>

⁴ <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs60-women-in-science-2020-en.pdf>

⁵ <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/fs60-women-in-science-2020-en.pdf>

⁶ https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022-en_0.pdf

opportunities and therefore quality of life, which helps narrow the development gap in ASEAN. The ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarships support this goal by providing financial assistance to disadvantaged women from ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste to access UK education in key STEM-related fields.

In 2024, the first year of the ASEAN-UK SAGE scholarships, 12 women from nine countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Timor-Leste) went to the UK to study a range of STEM subjects from Environmental Data Science and Machine Learning to Engineering Business Management at master's level at Imperial College London and the University of Warwick. They will be returning home after the end of the UK academic year.

Secretary-General of ASEAN, H. E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn said:

"ASEAN's workforce is vast, and it is imperative to harness the full potential of humanity by encouraging both girls and boys, men and women, to pursue and excel in STEM education, which is critical for the future world of work. By doing so, we ensure that ASEAN remains at the forefront of global economic and technological progress.

This scholarship comes at a timely moment as we in ASEAN look towards increasing the involvement of ASEAN women in STEM fields, reinforcing our commitment to gender inclusivity and sustainable development in alignment with regional and global priorities."

Ambassador of the UK to the Philippines, HMA Laure Beaufile said:

"The UK is proud to support women in STEM in ASEAN. The ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarships demonstrate the UK's commitment to inclusive and sustainable development through education and women's empowerment. They are yet another example of the thriving partnership between the UK and ASEAN.

The exceptional women who are undertaking the scholarships this year will return to their home countries to launch their STEM careers, driving science and innovation. They will advocate for women and inspire the next generation. And we hope they will build on their experience to develop research collaborations between ASEAN and the UK, where our universities are known for their top-notch STEM programmes."

Lotus Postrado, Director Philippines, British Council said:

"Recognising the vital role of women in shaping the future of science and innovation, we are proud to also launch the fifth year of the British Council Women in STEM Scholarships. This programme offers over 65 scholarships globally, including 25 for outstanding women from East Asian countries this year. These prestigious scholarships are more than just financial support—they are a gateway to world-class education, cutting-edge research, and a powerful global network of women leaders in STEM.

With both scholarship programmes, we want to equip talented women with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to thrive, investing in a future where they will break barriers, drive discoveries,

and inspire the next generation. Applications for both the ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarships and the British Council Scholarships for Women in STEM are now open until mid-April 2025, covering tuition fees, stipends, travel costs, visas, and health coverage.”

For more information on the ASEAN-UK SAGE Women in STEM Scholarships, please visit:
<https://www.britishcouncil.id/en/programmes/education/sage>

For more information on the British Council Scholarships for Women in STEM, please visit:
<https://www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-abroad/in-uk/scholarship-women-stem>

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Note for editors – not for publication - background info on ASEAN-UK SAGE Programme

The ASEAN-UK Supporting the Advancement of Girls' Education Programme or ASEAN-UK SAGE Programme is a five-year UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) funded programme for ASEAN and Timor-Leste running between 2023 and 2028 with funding up to GBP 30 million.

The UK's Dialogue Partner status with ASEAN was formalised in August 2021. A five-year ASEAN – UK Plan of Action (PoA) 2022–2026 was agreed in August 2022. The ASEAN-UK SAGE Programme is the first ASEAN-UK cooperation programme implemented under the PoA.

The ASEAN–UK SAGE Programme aims to provide evidence-based technical input that enables key players in the region including the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC), Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), and ASEAN Member States (AMSS) to develop effective policies and programmes that improve foundational learning for all and that tackle exclusion and constraints limiting the achievement of girls and marginalised groups. The Programme is delivered through the following workstreams/pillars:

- Foundational learning
- Out-of-school girls and marginalised groups
- Gender barriers to digital skills and employment

Integration of education technology will crosscut the three pillars.

The ASEAN–UK SAGE Programme is implemented by the British Council (www.britishcouncil.org), SEAMEO Secretariat (www.seameo.org), Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (www.acer.org), and EdTech Hub (www.edtechhub.org).
