

Local universities **achieve** higher global rankings

➤ Institutions focused on key areas such as employer reputation and sustainability to improve international standing

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia has been making strides in the global ranking of universities, driven by strategic efforts and a focus on research and internationalisation.

The QS World University Rankings 2024 revealed Universiti Malaya (UM) was placed 65th globally, Universiti Sains Malaysia at 137th, Universiti Putra Malaysia at 158th, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia at 159th and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia at 188th.

Among private institutions, Taylor's University was ranked 284th, UCSI University at 300th, Universiti Teknologi Petronas at 307th, Universiti Utara Malaysia at 538th and Universiti Teknologi Mara at 555th.

Times Higher Education 2024 data revealed UM ranked between 251 and 300 globally, which is an improvement from the 351 to 400 range last year.

Universiti Teknologi Petronas ranked between 301 and 350, moving up from the 401 to 500 range last year.

Tied at the 401 to 500 range were Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Universiti Utara Malaysia.

National Association of Private Educational Institutions secretary-general Dr Teh Choon Jin said the national universities have actively participated in global rankings and have improved their positions through strategic efforts.

"They have focused on key areas such as academic and employer reputation, research output and sustainability.

"Successful universities have prioritised research, leading to higher publication rates and more citations, significantly boosting their global standing."

He said although the rankings are important, the increasing number of higher learning institutions poses a challenge to maintaining and enhancing the standards of education and research output.

A study conducted by German online data platform Statista revealed Malaysia ranked 17th globally for the highest number of institutions, with 351 as of July 2023.

It revealed Malaysia was placed in the ninth spot for the most number of universities in Asia. India leads both globally and in Asia, with 5,349 universities.

Teh said the government has played a crucial role in supporting higher education through funding for research, scholarships and initiatives to collaborate with international institutions.

"However, the current universities are grappling with funding and resource constraints."

He said introducing more universities or colleges could strain regulatory bodies such as the Malaysian Qualifications Agency, making it difficult to uphold consistent quality and standardisation among a burgeoning array of institutions.

On the competence of professors, he said

the recruitment and retention of qualified faculty has become more difficult, with universities competing for a limited pool of top educators and researchers, driving up costs and potentially lowering standards.

He also said market saturation could result in lower student enrolment per institution, prompting universities to lower admission standards or focus on quantity over quality.

"The competition for research funding becomes fiercer, diminishing the capacity of individual institutions to carry out impactful research. Maintaining strategic focus and administrative efficiency becomes more challenging with the proliferation of universities, heightening the risk of inefficiencies and mismanagement."

He said it requires strategic resource optimisation, robust faculty development, rigorous quality assurance, clear strategic differentiation, enhanced collaboration and effective governance reforms.

"Ensuring sustained investment in research, infrastructure and academic programmes is crucial for maintaining and improving global standing."

On improving the ranking of Malaysian universities, Teh said enhancing international research networks and strengthening international collaborations are essential.

"Malaysian universities should actively seek partnerships with globally renowned institutions to enhance research output, increase citations and improve academic reputation.

"Continuous innovation and adaptation will be necessary to maintain and enhance the quality of education and research output."

He said the measures could help the country maintain high standards in its higher education sector.