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Vice-chancellors not too concerned

UNIVERSITI Kebangsaan Malaysia Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin has been asked the same question this time of the year for the past five years.

It is the time of the year when universities get to know where they are ranked among the other universities in the Times Higher Education-QS World University Rankings 2008.

"How do I feel? There's no feeling here," she told the *New Straits Times*.

To her, the world ranking is just that; a ranking.

As Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin aptly puts it: "It's not the be all and end all of universities' evaluation."

"Many other universities the world over are very critical about the evaluation process.

"So while we won't stop any of our universities from being evaluated, we must remember that their criteria is not exhaustive," he added.

This year, the country's three universities — Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia — are ranked higher than 2007 while the apex-status university, Universiti Sains Malaysia, saw a drop in its ranking.

The universities' vice-chancellors said "the ranking is not everything".

The VC club insisted that they had their own strategic and transformation plans, adding that they were consistently making progress.

Sharifah Hapsah said the university kept on improving, with its progress constantly monitored.

"We have been making steady progress, in terms of our research work, publications, citations..." she said.



Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin says the ranking is just a ranking



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As such, universities like UPM would not be able to score in some areas such as in terms of foreign student intake.

International students and international faculty represent five per cent each in the evaluation.

Nevertheless, he added that the ranking by discipline by THE-QS was very useful as it helped the university identify where it needed to improve.

"Our strongest area is life sciences, where we appeared in the 213th spot in the ranking by discipline for life sciences and biomedicine," he said, adding that the ranking was also an effective way for universities to promote themselves.

According to Nik Mustapha, UPM had set their target to get on the top 200 list by 2015.

UM acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Muhamad Rasat Muhamad said while the university has its own transformation plan in place, "we may think we have done good, when that may not be the true picture. It is good sometimes to have our performance measured by others."

UM hopes to make it to the top 200 list by 2010.

USM deputy Vice-Chancellor (academic and international affairs) Professor Ahmad Shukri Mustapa Kamal insisted that he did not know the university's ranking but was told that it had "dropped a few places".

"It is always difficult to comment when one drops in rankings because if you start to

question the rankings or justify the drop, the excuses will certainly not be acceptable.

"There has been some perception, however, among many universities not in the top 50 that the rankings have been rather volatile.

"I have always been from the school of thought that this ranking is useful but it is certainly not absolute," he said.

Ahmad Shukri added however that they would need to "scrutinise the data further to see what the reason for the drop is."

Despite claims that the criteria and evaluation process are flawed, the THE-QS ranking would still continue to influence those who are considering furthering their studies either at local or foreign universities. — By Jennifer Gomez and Irdiani Mohd Salleh