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No short cut to rankings

THERE are no Malaysian public universities in the top 400 of the *Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2013-14*.

Both Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) took part in the rankings, says THE World University Rankings editor Phil Baty.

"Unfortunately, UKM and UPM did not receive high enough scores across all of our indicators to be in the top 400 of the World University Rankings and therefore they do not have a rank.

"As in previous years, a number of Malaysian institutions also chose not to take part in the rankings, and did not provide their data to Thomson Reuters for analysis.

"This is a great shame as we would like to encourage more institutions to work with us so that a clearer picture of higher education in Malaysia can be formed, allowing

Malaysia to create a better benchmark for itself against the world's very best; monitoring their strengths in comparison to their global counterparts and also their weaknesses," he says in an interview.

Participation is entirely voluntary and if an institution does not submit its data to Thomson Reuters (which collects and validates factual data about academic institutional performance across a range of aspects and multiple disciplines), it is not ranked.

A total of 715 universities were analysed but some were eventually excluded from the ranking as they are graduate schools or have insufficient numbers of research papers. In the end, only 620 were ranked.

Asked whether the lack of Malaysian institutions in the rankings means they are considered "not good enough", Baty denies this.

"There is no short cut to improvements in ranking position. A long-term strategic approach to create genuine improvements in teaching and research will ultimately achieve better performance and higher ranking position," he adds.

Baty says the single area where Malaysian universities are underperforming the most is in the research related indicators.

In the short term, an intense focus on this area will likely result in improvements for Malaysian universities' performance.

In the long term, he says Malaysia can focus more on improving its academic reputation and also its financial indicators.

"This is the area we are seeing most improvements in from many of the East Asian universities which are stealing the march at the top of

the tables," he adds.

On the likelihood of a Malaysian institution breaking into the *THE World University Rankings* in the next five years, Baty says it is hard to suggest a time frame as this will rely on a number of factors.

"Overall, increased Malaysian engagement with the rankings will be a good starting point — there may already be Malaysian institutions which are performing well enough against our indicators to deserve a rankings position in the World University Rankings.

"But we don't know if they are ready to engage with the process and share data against our trusted, tough global standards," he says.

The *THE World University Rankings* is an annual list of the world's top institutions, using 13 separate performance indicators across five areas — industry outcome, teaching, citations, research and international outlook — to examine all the core missions of a

modern global university.

The core missions of any modern global university are research, teaching, knowledge transfer and international activity.

The list was announced on Oct 3 with the California Institute of Technology topping it for the third consecutive year while Harvard University and Oxford University tied for second place pushing Stanford University into fourth.

Baty says the United States remains dominant with seven institutions in the world top 10 and 77 in the top 200.

The highest-ranked Asian institutions are the University of Tokyo at 23, the National University of Singapore (26), University of Hong Kong (43), Seoul National University (44), Peking University (45), Tsinghua University (50), Kyoto University (52), the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (56) and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (57).