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Well done UPM and UTM!

IT is certainly heartening to see our Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) placed among the world's top 150 under 50-year-old universities in the United Kingdom's Times Higher Education (THE) rankings 2016.

Well done UPM and UTM! But don't rest on your laurels. Strive to achieve even higher positions in the rankings next time. And that's something all our other universities might also want to pursue – not simply to focus on being ranked among the top universities, but to achieve all-round excellence as well.

Switzerland's École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) topped the rankings with Singapore's Nanyang Technological University (NTU) coming second, making it Asia's top young institution.

For Singapore, this follows its success in last year's THE rankings

in which the National University of Singapore was crowned Asia's best university.

The rest of the top five in the young universities list were Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Netherlands' Maastricht University and South Korea's Pohang University of Science and Technology in third, fourth and fifth place respectively.

With three of the top five and four of the top 10 ranked young universities coming from Asia (the other six of the top 10 being from Europe), it shows that young tertiary institutions in Asia are increasingly able to provide innovation in higher education.

Luc Soete, *rector magnificus* at Maastricht University (ranked fourth), attributes his university's success to its "problem-based learning strategy", where small groups of students and their mentor explore together rather than listen to lectures.

Maastricht's "English unless" policy – which outlines that the default language for classes will be English – has also proven to be highly effective, attracting a large number of international students and academics (48% of its students come from outside the Netherlands) and significantly broad-basing the scope for study and research.

Bertil Andersson, president of Singapore's NTU (ranked second), stressed: "Innovative approaches to learning and teaching in English make it easy for NTU to attract international faculty, top established and young researchers with a good blend of East and West and to collaborate with many other world-class universities as English is a common platform for us."

Doh-Yeon Kim, president of South Korea's Pohang University of Science and Technology (ranked fifth), attributes the rise of the university to global excellence to its

policy of continuously recruiting and retaining world-class scientists and engineers; cutting-edge research infrastructure and environment; and substantial funding and support by the private sector and government.

Clearly, universities with a vision to focus on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and specialist institutions geared towards conducting advanced research and providing high-quality education to dedicated top-class talent from within and outside are the ones that reach the top in their respective disciplines.

Such institutions will undoubtedly enhance the quality of human capital, make a significant contribution to their nation's progress and lead the world in research and development.

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