

Varsity rankings credibility questioned

► UKM law alumnus says measurement dubious

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PETALING JAYA: While Universiti Malaya and other institutions of higher learning celebrate their ascent to a higher level in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) rankings, doubts have already been raised about its credibility.

As far as Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Faculty of Law alumnus Parveen Kaur is concerned, there is "no value to such rankings".

"How is the QS ranking or for that matter any other ranking of public universities, an accurate measurement of quality?" she asked in a statement yesterday.

Parveen, who is also a member of the KL Bar, likens it to assessing the quality of a fruit by the colour of its skin.

"And like (Hollywood's) Academy Awards, there is bias. (Why do you think) western institutions are always ranked highly?"

She claimed that 40% of the assessment is based on "academic reputation", which leaves most institutions in the shadows.

In the latest rankings, which was announced on Tuesday, Universiti Malaya rose 17 places to 70th spot this year.

Among other Malaysian institutions that have also gone up the ranks are Universiti Putra Malaysia (from 202nd to 159th spot), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (184 to 160), Universiti Sains Malaysia (207 to 165) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (228 to 217).

Parveen claimed that by publishing these rankings on their websites and social media sites or in the local newspapers, the public universities could influence public opinion and that is "a sorry state of affairs".

"This is simply perpetuating the myth of accuracy in assessment where there is none."

She said most university rankings use faculty-to-student ratio or peer review teachings and other methods which provide "a myopic viewpoint of what real education is".

Parveen also claimed that these rankings, for the most part, "are woefully glamorised".

"For students seeking the highest

standards, this is an easy-to-refer basis of quality in education.

"However, these rankings are limited in their assessments as they are based only on research output," she added.

Parveen said that if one looked beyond the numbers, "who is to say that our local public institutions are not higher up the ladder" when it comes to teaching quality, student progression and student development.

Former academician at Universiti Putra Malaysia Prof Dr Ahmad Ismail observed that all universities spend time to prepare themselves to meet QS criteria.

"The criteria should show the reality based on the evidence given. The question is whether the rankings truly reflect the quality of the universities," he said.

According to Ahmad, there have been complaints that the chase for higher rankings is putting pressure on the academic staff.

However, he told *theSun*, academic quality can usually be measured by student quality and research output. For that reason, he said, rankings are important "to a certain extent".

At the end of the day, he pointed out, the rankings should be based on merit.