NUS up, NTU down, in varsity rankings

Harvard remains first, while the University of Tokyo is top in Asia

By Sumathi V. Selvaretnam

SINGAPORE’S two biggest universities moved in opposite directions in the latest survey of international universities by The Times of London Higher Education supplement.

While the National University of Singapore (NUS) rose three places to No. 30, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) fell eight places to No. 77 on the list of 200 universities.

Harvard kept its position at the top while Yale moved ahead of Cambridge University into second place. The University of Oxford came in fourth.

The University of Tokyo emerged top in Asia at No. 19.

Kyoto University and the University of Hong Kong ranked 25th and 26th, ahead of NUS.

Other Asian universities in the top 50 were the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Osaka University, Peking University and Seoul National University.

NUS’ highly international faculty and students moved it forward in the rankings, said Mr Nunzio Quacquarelli, managing director of QS, the London-based careers and education group which compiles the highly-followed rankings.

The four-year-old list, which ranked universities in 33 countries this year, is used by prospective students, governments, employers, investors and the universities themselves as a guide.

More than half of NUS’ 2,103 faculty members are from overseas.

The university was also viewed favourably by employers in Asia, as well as its academic peers.

NUS president-designate, Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, said the university was pleased to be consistently ranked among the best in the world, and promised to build innovative programmes which would cement its place as a leading institution in Asia.

Six categories count towards the ranking: academic peer review, employer review, faculty-to-student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty, and international students.

The lion’s share of 40 per cent comes from a university’s reputation among its peers, while employers’ keenness to hire its graduates is a significant 10 per cent.

International faculty and students each contribute 5 per cent.

While NTU also did well in peer and employer reviews, it lost out slightly in the number of citations gathered by faculty members.

Its academic publications were not cited as often by academics in other universities compared to the schools ahead of it, said Mr Quacquarelli.

Publications which are influential are cited more often, and stronger universities tend to be behind such work.

NTU president Su Guaning is optimistic that NTU’s ranking will improve in a few years when work by new top faculty members will start to have an impact.

Among them are Caltech geologist Kerry Sieh and Associate Professor Christos Panagopoulos, a highly-regarded young physicist in Europe, said Dr Su.

Mr Quacquarelli also noted that rankings were contentious and should be used with caution as they cannot reflect all aspects of university excellence.

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