NUS, NTU climb global varsity rankings

Success due to improvement in staff to student ratio, and citations: Expert

By KEZIA TOH

THE Republic’s leading universities have climbed the ranks of a prestigious global league table released today.

The National University of Singapore (NUS) was placed 25th, up three spots from last year. This meant it was ranked second best in Asia after the University of Hong Kong, which was 23rd. Meanwhile, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) jumped 11 places from 37th to 26th.

The World University Rankings were put together by Quacquarelli Symonds, a London-based consultancy that provides information on higher education and career choices.

In a surprise result, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States claimed the No. 1 spot for the first time, trumping the traditionally top-ranked Cambridge and Harvard.

Quacquarelli Symonds’ head of research Ben Sowter said the success of Singapore universities was down to improvements in the ratio of teaching staff to students, and number of citations per faculty.

But they received a lower score when it came to the number of international students they take in. “This does not necessarily mean intake has slowed, but it could be that other top-ranked institutions are recruiting international students at a more rapid rate,” he said.

He added that NTU’s rapid rise fits a common pattern in science and technology institutions, which have become a top priority for many governments.

However, he cautioned against expanding the number of university places too rapidly.

“To maintain the standards they have established in recent years, increased intake would need to be met with a proportionate increase in staff hire, to ensure that faculty-to-student ratio is maintained and that research capacity is not affected.”

By 2020, the Singapore Government plans to raise the proportion of students in a given age group who go to university from the current 27 per cent to 40 per cent.

Quacquarelli Symonds’ rankings are based on indicators such as a university’s reputation among academics and employers, and the ratio of students to faculty members.

Academic reputation makes up the bulk of the overall score, and is based on a survey asking professors and lecturers which institutions they rate most highly in their fields of specialisation.

This year, more than 46,000 academics’ opinions were taken into account.

NUS president Tan Chorh Chuan said the latest rankings were “a strong indication that our bold enhancements to education and research are creating a positive impact”.

NTU president Bertil Andersson said his institution was poised to go further in the coming years, with the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine enrolling its first batch next year.

He said: “As NTU gears up to meet the grand challenges facing humanity like sustainability, new media and future health care, international recognition such as this can lead to broader engagement with global partners and bring about even more varied learning and research opportunities for our students and faculty.”

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List of top universities

1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
2. University of Cambridge
3. Harvard University
4. UCL (University College London)
5. University of Oxford
6. Imperial College London
7. Yale University
8. University of Chicago
9. Princeton University
10. California Institute of Technology (Caltech)
25. National University of Singapore (NUS)
47. Nanyang Technological University (NTU)