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ASIA

Technology universities dominate regional ranking

Yojana Sharma 16 October 2017 Issue No:479

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Asia's universities of technology are dominating regional Asian ranking, propelled by determined efforts by a number of governments in the region to put universities at the forefront of innovation-driven future economic growth.

Leading the pack in this year's just-released Quacquarelli Symonds' QS Asia University Rankings is Singapore's Nanyang Technological University or NTU Singapore, a publicly-funded engineering and technology university – albeit with a highly regarded [Rajaratnam School of International Studies](#). NTU has edged the larger and older comprehensive institution National University of Singapore or NUS into second place out of 400 universities in Asia.

Earlier this year NTU Singapore placed 11th in the QS World University Ranking. Compared to the World rankings, however, the QS Asian ranking also includes a bibliometric measure of research papers per faculty, as well as the number of citations per paper "to reflect the different priorities of the region's higher education systems", according to QS.

This gives NTU a competitive advantage, as it is already a "talent magnet and home" to some of the world's best professors, students and up-and-coming researchers, according to the university's president Bertil Andersson. "NTU's young and up-and-coming scientists make up 8% of tenured faculty in NTU, but they account for 40% of NTU's high impact publications," he said.

But others in Singapore note that NTU Singapore has a narrow subject range, focusing on engineering and technology, and only opened its medical school in 2013. In a similar vein, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology or HKUST outperforms Hong Kong's top comprehensive universities Hong Kong University or HKU and Chinese University of Hong Kong or CUHK in the AS Asian ranking.

Top Ten movements

Hong Kong's HKUST was in third place, with Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology or KAIST in fourth place just ahead of Hong Kong University, a comprehensive university that has topped regional rankings in the past, and Chinese University of Hong Kong or CUHK which was tenth on the list, as Hong Kong's other major comprehensive university. Another Hong Kong university, City University of Hong Kong was eighth.



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Universities in China have risen in the Asian region, pushing down Korean universities which in the past had three in the top ten – Seoul National University, KAIST and Pohang University of Science and Technology. Only KAIST figures among Korean universities in this year's top 10.

China's Tsinghua University, Beijing and Fudan University, Shanghai took Sixth and Seventh place with Peking University, Beijing placing ninth. Japan's Tokyo University dropped out of the latest top ten, although Japan has a large number of universities in the list overall.

Of NTU Singapore's performance QS research director Ben Sowter said: "At the very top of the table, the competition is fierce and the gap between institutions very narrow. Nevertheless, this still very young university, has tangibly demonstrated its prowess, both regionally and globally, and over a very short period of time has achieved an impressive ascending trajectory, supported by a strong leadership and a government that puts education, innovation and research excellence at the core of its agenda."

Innovation push by governments

Singapore, Hong Kong, China and South Korea dominate the latest rankings fuelled by major government programmes to promote innovation and research.

"NTU has been on a rapid upward trajectory over the past decade, ramping up our research, creating innovative academic and research programmes and building state-of-the-art facilities to meet the challenges of a fast evolving global higher education landscape," said Andersson.

Many Asian universities are receiving generous financial support from their governments in the form of policies, plans and programmes, such as Singapore's Research Innovation Enterprise 2020 Plan, Brain Korea 21, and China's Double First Class University Plan to create world-class universities by 2050," Andersson noted. "These initiatives help boost the universities' capabilities to better compete internationally for the best brains, resources and investments," he said.

"As a small country, Singapore was determined to be at the forefront of research and innovation to punch above its weight when competing with the bigger Asian countries in the knowledge economy," he added.

Singapore drive

But the edging out of the top slot of prestigious NUS, traditionally the country's premier institution, came as a shock in Singapore when it was [first noted in global rankings](#). NTU Singapore is seen as a clear beneficiary of the government's innovation drive.

"The (Singapore) government is firmly committed to research, innovation and enterprise, and is investing S\$19 billion (US\$14 billion) for the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) 2020 Plan from 2016 to 2020. This is S\$4 billion more than what was spent from 2011 to 2015," Andersson said in remarks to *University World News* on the link between NTU's research performance and the government's push.

"We have worked very hard for the competitive research funding. If NTU had not made strategic changes across the university, we could not have won the competitive grants either. So the strategic changes and the conducive environment and support created by the government go hand in hand," he said.

The Singapore government is also very supportive of industry collaborations, Andersson noted. NTU, the government agencies and the industry partners "form a compelling triple helix in international collaborations," he said pointing to NTU's corporate lab with UK aerospace company Rolls Royce, supported under a major Singapore government initiative.

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