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Introduction



Times Higher Education is renowned across the globe for its World University Rankings. The rankings use a gold-standard, balanced combination of 13 separate performance indicators to judge international research universities across all their core missions and to deliver a clear, data-driven picture of excellence.

But data cannot capture everything that is great about a university, and they cannot always identify focused or niche pockets of excellent practice inside an institution as complex and multifaceted as a university. It was because of the great depth and diversity of Asian higher education that we chose to launch our first overseas awards on the continent, following 15 years showcasing excellence in the UK, where our awards event is widely known as the sector's "Oscars". These awards allow us to recognise and reward good practice and innovation across a range of activities not directly captured by the rankings, in areas such as student recruitment,

strategic development, technological innovation and, indeed, leadership – based not on pure data, but on the subjective judgement of our expert panel of judges.

The judging process this year has been a hugely rewarding and stimulating experience – especially as the global university sector has been facing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. A team at *THE* and our expert guest judges sifted through hundreds of applications to shortlist a stunningly diverse range of projects from across the continent. We were delighted to select examples of excellence from well-known and traditionally prestigious institutions, as well as to celebrate innovation and quality at less renowned universities that might not feature in the global rankings.

All the shortlisted projects, and those selected as winners and outlined in this inspiring publication, are very worthy of the spotlight *THE* is delighted to give them.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Phil Baty". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer, *THE*

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Outstanding Leadership and Management Team

Tsinghua University

The progress of Chinese universities in rivalling established global institutions has been one of the hallmark trends of higher education in recent years, and Tsinghua University is one of the prime examples.

It is now firmly established among the top 30 universities in *Times Higher Education's* World University Rankings, rubbing shoulders with leading institutions in Europe and North America. But its leadership on global issues also underscores this newfound status.

An example of that leadership forms the crux of its award for Outstanding Leadership and Management Team of the Year: Tsinghua's involvement in setting up the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate (GAUC).

Just months after the 2019 meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, 12 universities jointly launched GAUC, with Tsinghua holding the inaugural chair of the alliance.

In this role, the university supported GAUC's work across objectives including strengthening research collaboration, promoting technological innovation to tackle climate change and working on joint public-awareness projects.

The achievements of the GAUC in its early days have included representatives from 55 universities gathering at Tsinghua in November 2019 for the alliance's inaugural Graduate Forum and a youth delegation from the GAUC attending the UN's Climate Change Conference, COP 25, in December.

"The stellar progress and achievements of Tsinghua are well known, and the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate, with Tsinghua's founding role and the Inaugural Graduate Forum, is effective testimony to its leadership role in China and the world," our judges said.

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International Strategy of the Year

Southern University of Science and Technology

The Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) won in this category for implementing a comprehensive and successful international strategy that included strengthening global partnerships, events and student mobility.

The Chinese institution signed 11 new research partnerships with prestigious global universities in diverse locations including France, Australia and Japan during 2019, as well as sealing an agreement with King's College London to develop a joint medical school.

Meanwhile, 2019 marked the fifth anniversary of SUSTech's international office, and the institution held its first International Symposium on Innovation and Collaboration to celebrate. More than 50 representatives from over 30 world-leading institutions participated in the three days of discussion.

SUSTech has continued to make progress on student mobility, with more than half of its first-year students participating in study-abroad programmes in 2019. The share of students taking part in longer-term programmes overseas also increased, from 20 per cent to 45 per cent.

At the same time, inbound international student mobility grew as a result of the development of entrepreneurship programmes designed to exploit the university's location in Shenzhen, China's "Silicon Valley".

The judges said the "scale and depth" of SUSTech's achievements were "really impressive", adding that there was "evidence of high-level collaboration from the leadership of the university with government counterparts in the country, and visibility and presence at international conferences designed to push the boundaries on international collaboration".

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Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year

An-Najah National University

The An-Najah National University (ANNU) in Palestine faces a highly volatile political environment, with restrictions on the mobility of people and goods, land use and natural resources, but it has worked hard to ensure that its students are able to successfully learn.

In 2019, ANNU integrated the Najah Community Pathways Programme, a grass-roots community engagement initiative that has been running on campus for many years, into its teaching and learning strategy.

This programme provides a host of educational courses in community settings that allow students to learn as they serve their immediate communities – a service-learning scheme that encourages students to tackle real-life problems. Alongside 80 community partners, including private companies, government organisations and NGOs, ANNU has developed 75 service-learning courses that cut across different disciplines and have served thousands of students.

The projects include building Geographic Information Systems for city councils, awareness videos for victims of child abuse and designing nutrition protocols for diabetic patients. Through the programme, students developed important values, such as democratic decision-making as part of a team and conflict resolution mechanisms, with learner satisfaction surveys showing that the students felt they had gained a host of competencies, including self-reliance and negotiation skills.

Through the programme, ANNU academics were able to demonstrate how bottom-up initiatives in teaching and learning can change the organisational strategic priorities and impact institutional structures.

“Located in Palestine, ANNU does not have what most other universities have: a reasonably safe environment to support teaching and learning,” the judges said. However, they commended the institution for being able to integrate the programme into its strategy plan and create unique learning opportunities for its students “against all odds”.



Outstanding Support for Students

Katalyst, in collaboration with the College of Engineering Pune (COEP) and Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI)

A collaborative initiative based in India that helps women from low-income backgrounds pursue professional education has scooped this year's award for supporting students.

The Katalyst scheme prepares young women for leadership roles through its engineering and science curriculum, one-to-one mentorship, access to in-class technology, assistance securing internships and important exposure to industry.

Katalyst, which was founded in 2007, has collaborated with leading engineering institutes in Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore and New Delhi, with its primary partners being the College of Engineering Pune (COEP) and Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI).

These institutions offer multiple engineering learning streams and have students enrolled for undergraduate and postgraduate courses. So far, the project has supported almost 1,200 female students, with 650 in the current cohort, and

participants have been able to gain experience at companies such as Goldman Sachs, Viacom, Siemens and many others.

In 2019, Katalyst provided participants with more than 50,000 hours of classroom training as well as access to Pearson's 100-hour Online English programme.

The judges said they admired the specific focus on women who were often significantly disadvantaged.

"There is a clear vision that emphasises the liberation of women and the building-up of talent. There is breadth and depth within the programme and some really strong partners. And there is scale in terms of numbers impacted – both by Katalyst overall and by the specific implementations at COEP and VJTI," they said.

The judges added that they were pleased to see evidence detailing the impact of the programme and the use of multiple indicators.

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Technological Innovation of the Year

Tsinghua University

Tsinghua University's winning entry centred on a teaching and learning data management system that has already had wide reach across the sector.

Rainclassroom Pro, launched in 2019, uses artificial intelligence technologies to provide university managers with access to comprehensive real-time reports on the teaching process and student performance. Users can watch the daily teaching dynamics of the entire university, including when a teacher publishes materials and the status of student attendance. The system also automatically sends monthly reports to the relevant administrators.

The system is based on Tsinghua's Rainclassroom mobile teaching tool, which integrates online and offline learning methods using PowerPoint and WeChat. Rainclassroom Pro allows managers to see how students are using this technology during, before and after classes.

The technology enables teachers to evaluate students' daily learning behaviour and

performance and alerts them if a student regularly submits incorrect answers, does not participate in class or comes to class unprepared. It provides a more thorough assessment of learning than the traditional method of evaluating test scores.

The system also periodically sends students evaluation questionnaires so they can review their courses and teachers, and it stores study resources, such as presentations, documents and videos, as well.

So far, 178 universities have adopted Rainclassroom Pro.

The judges said they were impressed by the wide-ranging features of the technology and the traction it had gained in a short space of time. They also acknowledged that the management system would be particularly useful for institutions and teachers during the coronavirus crisis.

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Workplace of the Year

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT)

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), in the east Indian city of Bhubaneswar, was named Workplace of the Year for its unstinting commitment to its staff, in particular to its early career faculty.

Those arriving at KIIT, which was designated an Institute of Eminence by India's University Grants Commission in 2019, are provided with start-up grants and study time to conduct their research, as well as financial assistance to network and present their work. Leadership and skills training, including English and computing classes, can also be accessed. Senior scholars are on hand to act as mentors to younger staff, who are encouraged to pursue higher research degrees thanks to a system of partial tuition fee waivers.

Academic freedom is prized: all departments enjoy autonomy in academic matters as part of a

transparent and decentralised governance system. KIIT's specialist centres of industrial collaboration are also complemented by faculty-level development programmes to encourage greater links with business.

In addition, KIIT's eco-friendly campus provides staff with on-site accommodation, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and meditation and yoga classes for all. Staff also benefit from medical insurance, reduced cost treatment at an on-site hospital and educational opportunities for their children at the university.

Our judges said they had been impressed by KIIT's "holistic approach to staff welfare" and the institution's "obvious desire to help academics fulfil their potential as researchers".

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Student Recruitment Campaign of the Year

Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University

The winner of this year's student recruitment campaign award is a small, young university that drew on the insights of its staff to expand its recruiting horizons and overhaul its internal processes in order to boost the enrolment of promising students in its PhD programmes. Founded in 2011, the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST) recognised that it had to leverage its strengths as it could not fall back on history or reputation.

First, acting on the advice of its staff, OIST revamped its marketing and promotional literature to catch the eyes of English-speaking international students, using an advertising agency to identify the materials that would create an attention-grabbing – and award-winning – brochure.

The university also streamlined the application process for those on its Research Internship Programme, an important source of strong PhD candidates. This meant that interns could easily apply and would be available for interviews while

still at the institution, sparing interested students extra bureaucratic burdens and travel costs. OIST continued to support those who were not successful in gaining a place on the internship programme, engaging with them through other outreach initiatives to help them to improve. These schemes were particularly successful in tapping into Japan's domestic student market.

Overall, the institution's strategic approach led to a threefold increase in the number of PhD applications in 2019, compared with 2018, making it OIST's most successful student recruitment campaign to date.

The judges said: "OIST is a young institution aiming to build a high-quality research programme. In student recruitment, it is obviously disadvantaged when compared with institutions with a longer history and a more established reputation. To recruit well, the institution adopted a more targeted and strategic approach that has really paid off."

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Excellence and Innovation in the Arts

University of Malaysia Sarawak

Academics are often exhorted to speak truth to power, but rarely to sing truth to power. Yet the drama and theatre programme at the University of Malaysia Sarawak's Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts has done just that – supporting the country's anti-corruption efforts through the unlikely medium of musical theatre.

Its production *Semarak Pertiwiku* tells a tale of bricklayers, bribes and backhanders that publicises corruption in the construction industry.

The musical drew on testimony from the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission and local state integrity officers to tell the fictional story of how a city's dream of building a skyscraper is wrecked by a construction company's decision to cut corners while siphoning off funds for luxury goods and lavish family holidays. Eventually, the structure collapses, killing several workers, because low-grade materials have been used and safety procedures ignored.

Staged by a 78-strong production team, the musical premiered in July 2019 in front of senior Malaysian politicians and later transferred to Malaysia's leading theatre venue, the Palace of Culture. Drawing on the rich local culture of the Sarawak region, the show mixed entertainment and real-life cases to demonstrate the full human impact of corruption.

Our judges praised the University of Malaysia Sarawak for its "daring and innovative approach to using theatre and performing arts to support the country's anti-corruption efforts". This fascinating work may help to "change norms and behaviour" and develop university-to-industry links that draw on local cultural heritage. "Their efforts to link theatre to anti-corruption work is as powerful as some of the work in Brazil using Forum Theatre for conflict resolution a decade ago," said one judge.

Regional or Societal Impact Award

Sungkyunkwan University

The *Times Higher Education* Impact Rankings take the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for assessing which universities around the globe may be benefiting society in ways that move beyond just research prowess.

To get a flavour of how institutions in Asia were performing in this area, we examined the scores from the inaugural 2019 edition of the ranking in three key SDG areas that saw the most university entries from the continent: "Good Health and Well-Being", "Quality Education" and "Industry, Innovations and Infrastructure".

Institutions from South Korea stood out for their strong showing across all these categories, but the one that emerged in the lead was Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul.

The institution was ranked in the top 10 globally in two of the three SDG areas assessed, with

its best performance coming in the "Quality Education" SDG – which considers achievements in areas such as education research, lifelong learning opportunities and teacher training – where it was the only South Korean institution in the global top 40.

Its College of Education, founded in 1972, has "contributed to Korean education and national development by leading the field of education research, as well as cultivating good secondary school teachers and educationists over the past 40 years", according to the institution's website.

Sungkyunkwan, originally founded more than 600 years ago and which claims to be the oldest university in East Asia, also achieved a high position in the Impact Ranking overall in 2019, reaching 30th in the main global list.

THE DataPoints Merit Award

King Abdulaziz University

For this DataPoints Merit Award, we looked at Asian universities that could be considered “unsung” stars of research – institutions that achieve strong research impact despite not necessarily being household names in global higher education.

The data underlying the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings revealed a diverse list of institutions in Asia that fitted this description, according to the information on citation impact and the views of the 10,000+ academics polled around the world for our annual Reputation Survey.

They included universities in Lebanon, the Philippines, South Korea and, of course, China, where the rise of the country’s best-known universities has been complemented by rapid improvements across its national higher education system.

However, it was Saudi Arabia’s King Abdulaziz University, which has consistently made the top

250 of the overall world ranking in the past few years, that came top in our assessment of the data.

The citation impact of its research puts it among the top 100 institutions around the world on this measure, with particular strengths in engineering, energy and materials science, according to data from Elsevier.

Its prominence in the minds of scholars voting in the Reputation Survey might be less well established than that of some of the world-famous research institutions in Europe or the US, but it may just be a matter of time before this changes.

If it does begin to attract the notice it deserves, and its research strength continues along its upward trajectory, then King Abdulaziz might no longer qualify as an “unsung research star” and could be propelled higher up the rankings overall.
