

UM's world ranking has risen in past five years, says VC

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Universiti Malaya vice-chancellor Ghauth Jasmon says the tertiary institution's world ranking for the past five years has in fact seen a rise, with last year's 156th ranking the best it has achieved.

Calling the rise and fall in the pursuit of improved rankings "normal", Ghauth told Malaysiakini that no university could continue to rise, and the important thing was that UM had shown an overall marked improvement over the years.

Responding on the slide of the country's oldest university's in the World University Rankings for 2013/2014, where it is 167th, Ghauth said the institution was taking measures to address it.

He noted there was a slight change in the way the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) assessed the academic reputation of the world's universities, which resulting in UM's drop.

Overall for the past five years between 2008 and 2013, UM had seen a rising trend.

"Last year's rank at 156 was the best achieved in the history of the university. There was a time eight years ago when UM was placed 89th, but there was a mistake made in the data sent to QS ranking at that time," Ghauth said.

In 2008, UM was ranked 230 among the world's tertiary institutions.

Ghauth explained that since 2009, the university had been taking several important steps to improve its world ranking and these include:

UM is actively concentrating on high impact research (HIR) from a RM590 million five-year grant given by the Education Ministry since 2011 to 2015.

UM also has hired three Nobel laureates and two distinguished fellows (of the rank of highly-cited researcher) as members of the HIR advisory council.

UM is finding more academic icons who have a record and background of conducting well-known research.

The institution is attempting and is in the process of bringing in 300 students

who have first class honours in its Bright Spark programme.

UM has established cooperation with 300 renowned universities worldwide including in South America and Africa, to work on joint research, academic staff exchange, joint doctorates and exchange of students.

Main reason for drop

Ghauth cited that the main reason for UM's drop this year was the drop by 3.8 percent of its score in its academic reputation.

He claimed the QS had changed its assessment in academic reputation, where emphasis is given to subject ranking, which had given a big impact on UM's overall standing.

azlan"QS had informed us that the emphasis is based on the excellence of a particular discipline or field in the university," said Ghauth.

He further alleged that the rise of 62,000 evaluators from 40,300 from the previous year, and that 35 percent of them were not familiar with Asia Pacific institutions, had resulted in the Academic Survey scores to be low and an overall decline in the ranking of universities in this region.

Besides this, there is a change in the evaluation of institutional discipline-specific reputation in academic reputation this year, where generally universities which practice the publication of high-quality journals and have strong collaboration as in the past would receive high scores, he added.

Most of the universities, Ghauth said are in the West.

He pointed out that overall there has been a drop in the ranking of tertiary institutions in the Asian region.

"Of the 33 Asian universities in the top 200, 19 have shown a drop, 11 had risen and three had maintained their position. According to the QS Supplement report, only two out of 24 of Japan's best institutions had risen and the same happened to Taiwan, South Korea, China, India and also Malaysia," he said.

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