

TOP UNIVERSITIES

THE-QS World University Rankings

BY: BY JOHN O'LEARY

The THE-QS World University Rankings are increasingly being used by governments and higher education bodies in a quest to boost their country's number of globally competitive universities.



The growing number of countries with world-ranked universities has increased the appetite of other nations to improve the quality of their higher education systems. As a result, competition between those at the top of the rankings has intensified.

A total of 33 countries were represented in the [2008 THE-QS World University Rankings](#) published in October – up from 28 in 2007. Although the leading positions were dominated by the US and the UK, growing numbers of Asian universities have been appearing in the top 200 and top 500 places.

China, Japan and Korea each have several universities in the upper reaches of the rankings and are anxious to have more. Jan Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, has predicted that leading Chinese universities may overtake the top British institutions within a decade unless there is more investment in higher education in the UK.

In China, those responsible for the higher education system believe that further progress up the rankings is only possible if the previous focus on increasing the quantity of research shifts to an accent on quality. At a conference in Beijing sponsored by Scopus, whose citations are used in the THE-QS rankings, **Professor Wu Qidi, the former Vice-Minister of Education, now chair of the National Committee of Engineering Accreditation**, said China was second only to the US in the number of academic papers produced, but the challenge now was to raise quality.

Professor Wu said rankings would be one of the spurs to universities in the drive for improvements. Both the [THE-QS rankings](#) and those produced by Shanghai Jiao Tong University were considered at

the Beijing meeting, titled From quantity to quality - how to improve innovations in Chinese higher education.

Eleven universities from mainland China and five from Hong Kong appear in the 2008 THE-QS rankings. The University of Hong Kong is the highest-placed at 26th, while Peking University is the leading mainland institution at 50th, four places ahead of neighbouring Tsinghua University.

Professor Peter Stambrook of the University of Cincinnati told the conference that Chinese academics had a relatively low success rate in the proportion of papers accepted for publication. Wu Yishan, a researcher at the Institute of Science and Technical Information of China, said this could be improved through the use of commercial 'paper polishing' services, the cost of which could be reimbursed by the state.

The meeting was attended by senior representatives of many of China's leading universities. Five universities in the west of the country, which has more lowly-ranked institutions, were awarded free access to the Scopus database as an aid to boosting research performance.

A second conference in the Philippines two days later, showed that the demand for world-class universities is not confined to the traditional academic leaders in Asia.

Dr Emmanuel Angeles, chairman of the Commission on Higher Education, said his commission had been charged with compiling its own rankings in order to assess the progress made by universities.

The forum, 'Becoming a World Class University', held in Manila, also took the THE-QS rankings as a benchmark of international quality. Two of the country's universities – Ateneo de Manila University and the University of the Philippines – appear in the top 300 in the 2008 rankings.

Lee Inn Beng, Singapore head of consumer marketing for Elsevier, owners of Scopus, told the forum that the THE-QS rankings were influencing students, graduate recruiters and other universities seeking research partners. He said the proportion of gross domestic product spent on higher education in the Philippines was among the lowest in the region, so it was vital to make the best possible use of resources.

Leaders of many of the top Asian universities will be discussing the rankings in greater depth at the World Class conference to be organised by QS in Bali in April.

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