

THE AWARDS
ASIA
2021



The winners

Introduction



For decades, *Times Higher Education* has been focusing on universities, seeing up close the life-changing work they can do. Over the years, we have expanded the scope of our coverage and, of course, developed our internationally respected suite of university rankings. Yet even all those efforts cannot capture every aspect of institutions' extraordinary accomplishments in education, research, outreach and more. To address that, we launched the *THE Awards* in the UK in 2005 to shine a spotlight on the overachieving but underappreciated work of universities, teams and individuals.

THE Awards Asia, which are now in their third year, aim to do the same in one of the most diverse and dynamic regions on the planet. It goes without saying that highly ranked, internationally renowned institutions feature on this roster, but they have no monopoly on exceptional achievements. These awards also call attention to institutions working beneath the radar that have been performing near miracles in extremely challenging circumstances.

Of course, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic threw up a frightening new challenge. Many of the record number of submissions we received related how resourcefully universities rose to the task, and we at *THE* and our distinguished group of guest experts found it a genuine privilege to immerse ourselves in these first-hand reports from all corners of the continent, detailing how universities responded speedily and ingeniously, deploying their resources to support students, staff and local communities through a crisis and to help point the way out.

Universities are full of brilliant, innovative thinkers working across academia, administration and at all levels of leadership and management, and if proof is needed, you will find it here in this document. Those featured have ensured that higher education has continued to thrive and deliver over the past 18 turbulent months, and we know that they will also be central to the recovery and future development of societies and economies. We hope you find their stories informative and inspirational.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Baty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer
Times Higher Education



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Leadership and Management Team of the Year

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) India

Amid global health, economic and social crises, the university leadership and management teams that stood out in this year's *THE Awards Asia* were those that "provided massive social and community service in their regions", explained our judging panel.

A diverse collection of finalists made this a highly competitive category, but for the judges, Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) "stands out for the volume and range of its contributions, including the development of free Covid-19 hospitals, its widespread distribution of masks and sanitisers, and the provision of free higher education for children of parents lost in the pandemic".

As well as making the pivot to remote online learning and examinations without significant disruption to the academic calendar while maintaining other vital institutional operations

throughout the pandemic, KIIT's leadership team saw to it that the institution delivered an extraordinary level of support to its local communities. No fewer than four specialist Covid hospitals were set up with help from the Odisha state government, treating thousands of patients, and essential commodities were distributed to those in need across the state. The university broadcast free educational programmes on regional television and provided free personal protective equipment for local health workers.

The judges concluded that "by addressing the challenge of Covid-19 through the implementation of online platforms for educational purposes in collaboration with external stakeholders, the development of medical facilities, and community engagement activities, KIIT demonstrated its readiness and capacity to react to the unknown, and also its engagement to serve society".



Workplace of the Year

Saint Joseph University of Beirut *Lebanon*

The public health crisis triggered by Covid-19 dominated every aspect of life in 2020. For Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ), however, it was not the only all-consuming crisis.

In August, a catastrophic explosion in Beirut's port caused devastation and demanded a response from a society already stretched to the limit by the pandemic.

Prioritising the well-being of all its staff, USJ launched three initiatives. The first was an extension of an existing Covid-response programme, through which the university had been providing food to Beirut's neediest families. This was expanded to focus on those left bereft by the blast.

With more than 200 university staff and student volunteers, the programme aimed, in the words of university chaplain Fr Jad Chebly, to "get in touch with those who have lost everything, go to their homes, clean up [and], provide comfort, provide food and medicine".

A second initiative was established to provide psychological and spiritual support to the university staff and students affected by the tragedy, with free-to-access programmes including counselling and community projects to address the trauma of events.

The university's Faculty of Business Administration and Management led the third programme, a community outreach effort to address the "monetary crisis, economic collapse and socio-political unrest" that overlapped with the public health crisis and the aftermath of the explosion.

The judges said USJ's "response in the face of truly terrible circumstances demonstrated its commitment to both internal support and broader outreach, of which the university and staff can be proud".

"It is a response that was unique to those circumstances but also had the effect of contributing to the creation of a very positive workplace environment," they said.



International Strategy of the Year

Hangzhou Dianzi University
China

Global travel was brought to a halt in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing universities to establish new and innovative ways of continuing their internationalisation strategies. In the most challenging of years, Hangzhou Dianzi University managed to both deepen its existing partnerships and launch new ones.

The university's strategy focused on expanding international exchange and cooperation with countries along the Belt and Road route by taking advantage of its strength in information-related disciplines. The result was 12 new collaboration agreements, involving 128 global partners across 30 countries, and six international online academic conferences.

The new partnerships included a joint education programme with Cyprus University of Technology and a graduate school in collaboration with Romania's Polytechnic University of Timișoara.

Hangzhou Dianzi also upgraded its joint education programme with the University of Paris and deepened its cooperation with the Monterrey Institute of Technology in Mexico. On the latter, teams from both institutions developed a Remote Labs project, enabling students and staff to conduct experiments without the need for physical laboratories. During the first coronavirus lockdown alone, it was used by more than 4,000 students. The two universities also jointly established a new research centre on national security focused on software and hardware design for big data systems, and there are plans for the centre to run master's and doctoral programmes.

The judges said Hangzhou Dianzi's strategy had "clarity in its direction and approach" and made "good use of the opportunities created by China's Belt and Road initiative".



Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year

National University of Singapore
Singapore

The disruption to teaching and learning during the pandemic has created an opportunity for universities to leverage technology to encourage more self-directed learning among students.

National University of Singapore's (NUS) Design Your Own Module (DYOM) programme is one example that puts students at the wheel of their own learning. By giving students the option to use eight unrestricted elective module credits, either in a group or individually, the university instils independence and critical thinking in them and cultivates a knowledge of how to learn that will serve them well as lifelong learners.

The initiative uses a low-risk "completed satisfactorily" or "completed unsatisfactorily" grading system that gives students a freedom to explore and learn for the sake of it.

One option in the DYOM programme connects students to massive open online courses (Moocs)

on the edX platform via the NUS learning management system, giving them immediate access to a wealth of expertise from lecturers and academics around the world.

The second DYOM option allows students to organise into groups of 10 or more and work closely with a mentor who is an NUS teacher, administrative staff member or industry leader. This helps students develop critical skills such as teamwork, communication and flexibility.

The scheme has proved popular with students. More than 1,800 students completed Moocs under one option of the programme in 2020, and the number of groups designing their own module with an NUS mentor doubled from eight in December 2019 to 16 in 2020. In total, more than 800 students have benefited from this option.



THE DataPoints Social Impact Award

Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember
Indonesia

A cornerstone aim of *Times Higher Education's* Impact Rankings is to reward those universities across the world that are working towards elements of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Not only do the rankings attempt to track those institutions using higher education and research to have a sustainability impact, they also seek to give credit to universities for providing evidence of their efforts, especially if that evidence is available publicly.

For this category, our data team assessed which universities in Asia were top of the pile for publicly demonstrating how they were working towards SDGs that relate to social issues such as poverty, health, education, equality and employment.

The shortlist included a diverse range of institutions, from Turkey to South Korea, all with scores reflecting that they had provided public evidence across at least half the relevant metrics in the Impact Rankings.

The winning university – Indonesia's Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember – was one of the standout global performers on this issue, with an impressive transparency score that demonstrated not only a commitment to the SDGs but also a desire to publicly back that up.

The university, which is at the forefront of fostering sustainable development through smart and eco-campus initiatives at its site in the city of Surabaya, also placed in the top 100 overall in the Impact Rankings, an achievement that would have been boosted by this transparent approach.



THE DataPoints Improved Performance Award

Universiti Utara Malaysia Malaysia

The rapid rise on the world stage of many universities in Asia has been one of the key trends in global higher education over the past few years, and some standout performers are now firmly in the overall top 50 of the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings.

However, the rise has not just been about the highest ranked institutions on the continent; there are abundant examples of universities that are on the move throughout the list.

To recognise this, the *THE* data team analysed Asian universities' performance over the past few years to pick out institutions that have improved the most rapidly.

The resulting shortlist includes representatives from six countries, but topping the list is the

Universiti Utara Malaysia, located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia near the Thai border.

Universiti Utara Malaysia has enjoyed steady progress in the World University Rankings; it placed in the 601-800 band in 2021 after rising from a position among the 1,000+ band just three years before. A public university that was established in 1984, its initial specialisation was management education, and this is still a strong focus.

Most of its undergraduate programmes are taught in English, but students must also learn Malay during their degree. Policies such as this may have helped it climb in the ranking as international outlook is a core component of its improved scores.



Excellence and Innovation in the Arts

Hong Kong Baptist University Hong Kong

Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) won this year's award for a strikingly original, highly topical, creative, collaborative and hugely ambitious interdisciplinary project that has attracted great praise from audiences and reviewers alike.

The artwork, *Space to Breathe*, is the first project from HKBU's interdisciplinary Augmented Creativity Lab, combining big data and immersive music and installation art practices to bring climate change research to life.

Combining real-time climate and pollution data with subjective human experience of air quality in Hong Kong and representing it through the human voice as a performative instrument, the artwork had the admirable goal of connecting data to human experience and climate science to personal action.

The artwork managed to be site specific yet completely accessible to a wide audience. It was

realised in the midst of the Covid pandemic but delivered in such a sustainable fashion that it remained open to live audiences while other spaces were being closed.

It has created international collaboration and it is set to be experienced by tens of thousands of people over the coming two years, as the concept is relevant and replicable in other locations.

By uniting art and science to educate, inspire and entertain, HKBU's entry was an outstanding example of how a university can mobilise its resources to push the boundaries of public appreciation and interaction with art.

The judges described it as a "very strong and innovative submission". "The articulation of the concept around air is very strong. It is collective in its spirit and personalised in its interaction," the panel said.



Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year

O. P. Jindal Global University
India

When O. P. Jindal Global University (JGU) published its Covid-19 Response Tool Kit in summer 2020, nobody knew how terribly the pandemic would hit India or how essential that document would turn out to be.

The 80-page toolkit, crafted in collaboration with the Association of Indian Universities, offers detailed guidance on a wide range of technological challenges faced by higher education institutions around the world. It addresses some of the trickier parts of online learning – such as clinical work and assessments – while taking into consideration the social and infrastructure constraints in a developing country such as India.

As a private and elite institution, JGU was capable of shifting an impressive 24,000 courses online. However, it was aware that many other less

privileged universities could not manage to do this on their own.

So it used its internal software tools to create Tou, a cloud-based application that could be used at educational institutions across India, including at primary and secondary level. JGU has offered this service for free, to help schools use digital means to manage data, classrooms, fees and exams.

JGU's was not the most high-tech submission seen by the *THE* judging panel. However, it had the most social impact in a vast country that has been one of the world's hardest hit by Covid.

Our judges hailed the toolkit as a “fantastically useful document that could be scaled for universities worldwide” and applauded the fact that Tou was being used to bridge India's digital divide.



Outstanding Support for Students

Universiti Teknologi Petronas *Malaysia*

The Covid-19 pandemic forced universities to rapidly rethink their student support services and, in particular, to provide graduates with the employability and entrepreneurship skills that they will need in an uncertain job market.

Universiti Teknologi Petronas received this year's Outstanding Support for Students Award for a virtual entrepreneurship programme that not only supports students through the pandemic but also has the scope to become a long-term project.

The Technopreneurship Centre organised 58 entrepreneurial development programmes, 90 per cent of which were delivered virtually, seeking to provide students with an alternative route towards employment and to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset.

The programme was separated into four levels known as the "4Es" – explore, equip, engage and excel. Each level provided students with

workshops, sessions and programmes that helped them to network with local businesses, run their own businesses on campus, conduct peer training and contribute to society through creating new job opportunities within the community.

Through the technology entrepreneur development framework, in 2020 more than 3,500 students took part in these entrepreneurial programmes across the four levels.

In addition, more than 3,700 jobs were created by Universiti Teknologi Petronas entrepreneurs for stay-at-home mothers, unemployed young people and students.

The judges said the programme "supports students now and in the future to make the most of their education and gives them the opportunity to proceed to start-ups or to innovative roles with existing organisations. It shows significant scale in terms of student benefit."



Student Recruitment Campaign of the Year

Hanoi University of Science and Technology *Vietnam*

Transforming student recruitment during a pandemic would be a challenge for any institution, but Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST) successfully led this process for scores of institutions.

For nearly 10 years, HUST has chaired the Vietnam Northern Admissions Association, analysing the admissions scores of students applying for 50 to 60 universities based on each member's course list, entry requirements and recruitment targets.

In 2020, HUST – in a first for Vietnam – introduced a new online application portal and an optional aptitude test.

The portal allows students to submit international standardised test results, recommendation letters and details of other achievements, with submissions followed up by interviews – either online or in person.

This represents a significant shift for Vietnam, where admissions have traditionally been shaped only by scores in national entrance examinations.

The aptitude test allowed students to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy abilities, and in its first year was used in about 10 per cent of admissions. Following its successful introduction, its use will be widened.

HUST highlights that its approach, allowing “multiple admission methods” both online and offline, “helps increase the chances of students getting into their favourite universities, embracing their distinctive strengths other than performance on textbook-based tests and regardless of the students' locations”.

Our judges were impressed to see that HUST's approach led to a better student intake for all participating institutions.

“Due to Covid-19, HUST adopted an online approach to connect applicants to current students and alumni and allow them to gain a good understanding of the university,” the panel noted.



