

## Help in making informed choices

By NGEH CHEE YEN

SINCE the establishment of Malaysia's first university in 1962, the higher education environment in Malaysia has expanded tremendously.

Based on 2017 statistics provided by the Education Ministry, there are 20 public universities in this country, of which five are research universities and four are technical universities. In the private sector, there is a total of 497 institutions: 401 colleges and 96 universities and university colleges. These numbers do not include the 94 community colleges and 34 polytechnic schools in the country.

With such a large number of higher learning institutions established in Malaysia, the number of students registered at these institutions do not disappoint.

There are 618,180 students in public institutions, 524,350 students in private institutions, 21,486 students in community colleges and 89,503 students in polytechnic schools.

Things are looking up for Malaysia in how it is drawing international students as well. In May last year, former Higher Education Ministry secretary-general Tan Sri Dr Noorul Ainur Mohd Nur said the country is targeting to enrol 250,000 international students by 2025. She said that as of last year, there are 170,000 international students from more than 135 countries throughout Asia, Europe and Africa.

### Ensuring quality

With such a large influx of higher learning students both locally and internationally in Malaysia, it is crucial that

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Therefore, the Rating for Higher Education Institutions in Malaysia (Setara) were introduced in 2007 to evaluate and monitor the quality and achievements of universities and university colleges in Malaysia.

In 2017, the fifth edition of the rating was released. Seventy-one institutions were evaluated, with eight institutions rated 6 Star: Outstanding, 21 institutions rated 5 Star: Excellent, 29 institutions rated 4 Star: Very Good, 12 institutions rated 3 Star: Good and one institution rated 2 Star: Satisfactory.

It was noted that not all universities in Malaysia participated in the 2017 rating, which lets many institutions operate regardless of the local quality standard. Because of this, there is the probability of students losing out both on their education and money paid if they enrol in a university that has not been evaluated or



The Government has made it mandatory for all private universities to be rated under MyQuest and Setara, which will help students make better choices for their tertiary education.

recognised by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA).

Therefore, in December last year, Deputy Education Minister Teo Nie Ching said the ministry will make it mandatory for all private universities to undergo future editions of Malaysian Quality Evaluation System for Private Colleges (MyQuest) and Setara.

With this new policy in place, students and parents will be provided with a comprehensive rating for all universities. In addition, this decision acts to prompt universities to strive for improvement in the education industry, while also upping their standards to stay on top of the competition.

### Incorporating research methodology

Knowing how an institution is rated is also important, as it defines the substance and credibility of a certain research or rating procedure.

With the latest Setara procedures, institutions are divided into three categories – mature universities with at least 15 years of establishment, emerging universities with less than 15 years of establishment and university colleges – as opposed to previous editions where there are only two categories: public and private institutions.

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# Do stars have substance?

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The rating instrument is based on a seven-step methodology that takes into account national and international benchmarks, stakeholder engagement, pilot runs, data verification and sensitivity and validity analysis. The criteria are divided into four main categories: general (institutional profiles), teaching and learning, research capacity, and services and income generation.

Each category carries a different weightage depending on the age of the institution, as shown in Table 1. Table 2 is a breakdown of the judging criteria.

## Go with recognised names

With efforts by the Government to unify the standards of education and initiatives by institutions to ensure their overall education standards and services are excellent, parents and students should not slack on researching which one to enrol in.

This is because every university has its pros, cons and niche specialisations that feed into different fields. Besides that, it is crucial for these universities to be accredited by the MQA and respective boards of practice should the student want to procure a job in the future.

Instrument	Category		
	Mature university (≥15 years)	Emerging university (<15 years)	University college
General	40%	40%	40%
Teaching and learning	30%	40%	50%
Research	20%	15%	5%
Services	10%	5%	5%

Table 1

General: Institutional profiles	Teaching and learning	Research capacity	Services and income generation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student quality and diversity</li> <li>- Lecturer capability</li> <li>- Academic staff recognition</li> <li>- Quality management system</li> <li>- Financial stability</li> <li>- Institutional reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capacity of academic staff</li> <li>- Student satisfaction on teaching and facilities</li> <li>- Quality of graduates</li> <li>- Internalisation of academic programmes</li> <li>- Programme recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Critical mass of researchers</li> <li>- Research income</li> <li>- Quantity of publications</li> <li>- Quality of publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Income from commercialisation of ideas</li> <li>- University social responsibility and knowledge transfer partnerships</li> <li>- Education and training programmes</li> <li>- Other sources of income</li> </ul>

Table 2

## Starting at the top

The Setara rankings released in 2017 recognised eight mature universities with 6 Star: Outstanding status and 21

institutions with 5 Star: Excellent status. Here is the list of Malaysia's top universities.

6 Star: Outstanding	
International Medical University	Universiti Putra Malaysia
Monash University Malaysia	Universiti Sains Malaysia
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
University of Malaya	Universiti Teknologi Petronas

5 Star: Excellent	
Curtin University Sarawak Campus	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus	Universiti Teknologi Mara
University of Nottingham Malaysia	Universiti Tenaga Nasional
International Islamic University Malaysia	Universiti Utara Malaysia
Universiti Malaysia Perlis	Taylor's University
Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation	Universiti Malaysia Pahang
International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu
Management and Science University	Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia
Sunway University	Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
UCSI University	Lincoln University College
Kolej Universiti Sains Perubatan Cyberjaya	

### Legend:

Mature universities Emerging universities University colleges

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