THE Awards Asia 2025

The winners

Introduction

The achievements of universities can be benchmarked and celebrated in many ways. One is through league tables, where Asia's higher education institutions have made impressive progress over the past decade. But we at *Times Higher Education* have always been clear that rankings – including those that we produce ourselves – cannot be the only measure of university success. And they will certainly never capture the full richness of the teaching, research and related activity that happens on campuses day in, day out.

This is why it has been so gratifying to see our awards embraced globally, with this edition, the *THE* Awards Asia, now in its seventh year and boasting more than 500 entries spanning a dynamic and diverse continent. The 80 shortlisted entries represent an illuminating showcase of Asia's universities and of how they are central to addressing major societal challenges across the region and around the globe, with the winning submissions featured in this booklet truly illustrating the best of the best.

While these winners would all stand out in any given year, in this, my first awards as *THE* editor, I hope you'll allow me to single out a couple of personal highlights. Hiroshima University's triumphant entry in the International Strategy of the Year category, outlining its development of a peace education programme bringing students – including those from conflict-afflicted countries – and higher education leaders to the site of the first atomic bombing, seems a particularly compelling initiative to honour in these troubled times. And it is also pleasing to introduce our first individual category, Most Innovative Teacher of the Year, with the inaugural winner, the University of Hong Kong's Ki Sum Samson Wong, a worthy victor – and a reminder that at the heart of everything that happens in higher education are the people who work and study in it.

Since becoming editor earlier this year, it has been a huge privilege to support our esteemed judges and to learn more about our inspirational entrants. Please join me in congratulating all those who were shortlisted, as well as our highly deserving winners.

Chris Havergal
Editor, *Times Higher Education*

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Judges

Christine Ennew
Emeritus professor of marketing, Warwick Business School, University of Warwick

Max Lu
President and vice-chancellor, University of Surrey

Michael Fung
Executive director, Institute for the Future of Education, Tecnológico de Monterrey

Bashir Makhoul
President, University Canada West

Yuko Harayama
Professor emeritus, Tohoku University

Joanna Newman
Provost and deputy vice-chancellor education, SOAS University of London

Vijay Kumar
Senior adviser to VP open learning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Fernando Reimers
Ford Foundation professor of international education, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Mei Mei Lim
President, APAC, *Times Higher Education*

Rocky Tuan
Former vice-chancellor and president, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Leadership and Management Team of the Year

Ahmedabad University
India

If the measure of a successful leadership and management team is the distance travelled by the institution in their care, then the custodians of Gujarat's Ahmedabad University can be rightly proud of their achievements.

The private university, founded in 2009 through the merger of a collection of colleges, tasked itself with what it described as a "relentless pursuit" of excellence. The result in recent years has been the transformation of the institution from, in its own words, a "routine above-average college hub" into a leading player in western India's research and innovation system.

Key decisions included reducing student intake and increasing faculty appointments to bring the staff-to-student ratio down from 1:30 to below 1:18, and incentivising research activity, by cutting teaching loads, increasing funding and setting a six-year tenure review clock, among other measures.

Sponsored by the philanthropic organisation Ahmedabad Education Society, the university has adopted an educational approach based around the liberal arts and interdisciplinarity. It has made increasing student diversity a priority, with special weighting given to applicants from disadvantaged and vernacular language backgrounds.

Ahmedabad has also placed significant emphasis on academic autonomy and participatory decision-making, while also developing a sustainable campus with the help of leading global architects.

"We felt that the university had taken decisive, bold and imaginative action to transform itself into a research-intensive community of scholars and students," the judges said.

"The approach adopted was clearly a result of leadership working together to achieve transformational change in the space of a few years, to the benefit of the university and its local and national context."

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International Strategy of the Year

Hiroshima University
Japan

Drawing on its city's tragic history, Hiroshima University has developed a remarkable peace education programme as part of an international strategy that involves groups of students visiting the region to engage with the stark legacy of atomic bombing.

Initially established as a summer school in 2006, the programme was expanded in 2023 to welcome more participants from universities around the world, including providing scholarships for students from conflict-affected countries and minority backgrounds.

In addition to the summer school, the university, in partnership with other global institutions, now facilitates a peace study tour centred around the annual anniversary of the bombing on 6 August. There is also a leadership initiative for university presidents, which underscores the role of higher education institutions in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

At a time of multiple global conflicts, these projects attempt to mobilise students and academics to advance peace and encourage action to prevent any recurrence of the destruction that Hiroshima experienced.

The judges praised the university's international strategy for its "huge" impact on peace education since the project launched. The summer school "has offered transformative experiences based on Hiroshima's history for thousands of students and staff from all over the world", the judges said, "uniting" them to "explore conflict resolution and sustainability".

"The 2024 University Presidents for Peace initiative also gathered global education leaders to promote peace through collaboration," they continued. "For its commitment to global peacebuilding and education, Hiroshima University is the worthy recipient of this award."

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Most Innovative Teacher of the Year

Ki Sum Samson Wong
University of Hong Kong

Paediatric palliative care is rarely addressed in undergraduate medical curricula. Graduates say this leaves them unprepared for the difficult conversations they may face with patients and their families.

Ki Sum Samson Wong, an assistant lecturer in the medical ethics and humanities unit at the University of Hong Kong, has sought to change this with the help of a virtual reality video game, *That Dragon, Cancer*.

Created with two bereaved parents, it uses recordings to recount their story of losing their five-year-old son to an aggressive form of brain cancer. Reflecting the complexities of emotions felt by families at such a difficult time, the game aims to shape students' understanding of psychological pain and to help them support bereaved loved ones.

Second-year medical students underwent an in-class immersive experience using vignettes from the game, paired with mini-lectures and workshops. In subsequent surveys, 89 per cent of the students agreed that this teaching method had been highly effective in helping them learn about grief; some reported that it had left an "indelible mark" on them, aiding their ability to care for and support dying patients.

Judges said that although a "highly important challenge" in medicine, "anticipatory grief" does not generally receive sufficient attention in the curriculum.

"The adoption of digital-visual technology to bring this to the attention of medical students, particularly in the early stage of their education and training, can thus have long-term positive impact on their professional maturation and readiness," they added.

"Ki Sum Samson Wong's effort deserves recognition for its relevance, innovation and demonstrated effectiveness."

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Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership

Hiroshima University
Japan

Matching government targets on carbon neutrality can be difficult for some institutions, but not for Hiroshima University. It was the first higher education institution in Japan to announce a concrete goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 – 20 years ahead of the state target of 2050.

Hiroshima received the award for Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership for its bold ambition, as well as for the practical steps it is taking to achieve this goal.

Its comprehensive three-pronged strategy includes reducing its carbon footprint across the main Higashi-Hiroshima campus through extensive installation of solar panels and promoting research by using its campus as a "giant demonstration site" to assess different approaches to achieving a carbon-neutral society.

The third pillar of the "Carbon Neutral x Smart Campus 5.0" initiative involves educating students. For this, university-wide courses on carbon neutrality have been rolled out for undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. Students have also been taking part in a joint project with the car manufacturer Nissan to assess the role of electric vehicles in linking the energy, housing and transport sectors.

Judges praised the institution's effective multi-pronged approach for having clear impacts on the environment and for being "synergistic and mutually reinforcing".

"The authenticity of requiring students to take required courses in carbon neutrality in an institution that is 'walking the talk' adds relevancy to these lessons, as does advancing knowledge in this field with research on university energy usage," the panel said.

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Outstanding Contribution to Regional Development

Hanyang University
South Korea

By collaborating with regional and national authorities and working with local businesses, Hanyang University has supported the development of the burgeoning robotics industry in Ansan, South Korea.

A series of hands-on training programmes that focus on areas including automation technologies have created a pipeline of skilled professionals to work in the region and in a sector that faces a talent shortage. Building on this work, the Center for AI-Robotics Education was developed in 2014 with funding from local and central government, supporting the sustainability of the venture.

The project has attracted increased investment into the Ansan region and is thought to have contributed to an annual revenue rise of W17.4 billion (£9.3 million) for local robotics firms, laying the foundation for long-term regional economic resilience.

Not only has the Robot City Ansan initiative bolstered the local economy, it has fed into South Korea's national strategy for technological advancement, helping the country to become more globally competitive in robotics and gain a place on the global stage.

"Hanyang University's Robot City Ansan initiative stands out because of its unique integration of education, research and industry in one cohesive ecosystem," the judges said. "By creating a cutting-edge robotics hub, the initiative has attracted top-tier companies, fostered high-tech start-ups and generated new job opportunities, revitalising the Ansan region.

"Its real-world impact, strategic partnerships and role in positioning South Korea as a global robotics leader serve as a model for other institutions."

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Outstanding Support for Students

National Taiwan University
Taiwan

Students have an active hand in National Taiwan University's efforts to give them a clear path to achieving their personal goals.

NTU's "Illuminating, Navigating and Transforming" programme is grounded in self-directed learning. It starts with an advisory service that identifies students' needs and supplies them with the resources they require. Academics, industrial experts and peer mentors help to clarify the students' personal values and design tailored learning pathways for them.

Meanwhile, the NTU Specialisation Programme helps learners explore their interests both within and beyond their majors by rearranging courses into carefully defined themes such as information security, robotics or sustainable development. Altogether, 267 of these thematic "modules" have been developed, each offering four or five courses and a capstone research or practical project to reinforce students' insights.

Two interdisciplinary bachelor's programmes allow students go one step further with this self-directed learning approach and design their own degrees. More than 130 students have taken advantage of these services to transcend traditional majors by crafting degrees such as "spatial policy and planning sciences" and "human-robot interaction for long-term care".

The judges were impressed by the way NTU had integrated academic and career support, bolstered by contributions from external employers.

"This submission stood out because of the breadth and depth of the support provided," they said. "NTU is combining structured and needs-driven advice to students with carefully thought-through thematic study pathways and flexible degree programmes.

"This initiative supports students to acquire skills and knowledge that are aligned to their individual interests and ambitions."

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Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Hong Kong

With its towering skyscrapers and apartment blocks, Hong Kong is regarded as the epitome of the modern city. Yet not far from the densely populated centre is a reminder of a more traditional way of living in the form of 200 abandoned villages within Hong Kong's New Territories. Those properties are, however, at risk of being lost or redeveloped, which would mean a rich rural culture being extinguished forever.

Thomas Chung from the Chinese University of Hong Kong led a project that sought to document life in the 400-year-old Hakka village of Mui Tsz Lam, including its heritage and traditions. Two ruined houses were restored using centuries-old building techniques – with one edifice converted into an open-air culture gallery and another becoming a community space – and more properties have been receiving similar attention.

Combining the centuries-old designs of the old villages with new technologies established what might be seen as an authentic Hong Kong aesthetic for modern living, which might soon inspire further development within the 1,000 square miles between Hong Kong Island and Shenzhen.

Nearly 200 former villagers were invited back as part of efforts to reconnect one-time residents to the restoration work, and the university has established an education-research base to further these cultural collaborations.

In subsequent years, the rural revitalisation project has won grants totalling more than $6 million (£4.6 million), with work extending to seven villages.

Our judges praised the university's project as a "highly effective, innovative and well-executed project with measurable impact", noting that student, staff and local engagement had breathed new life into a ghost town and re-energised a local culture that risked being lost to the march of modernity.

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Research Project of the Year: STEM

Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR)
Malaysia

Additive manufacturing, better known as 3D printing, is rapidly emerging as a cornerstone of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, its adoption in South-east Asia, particularly in Malaysia, has been constrained by high costs, limited materials choices and shortages of expertise – not least in handling the hazardous metal powder created by conventional laser-based 3D-printing systems.

This project at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) aimed to develop a safer, cost-effective and eco-friendly 3D-printing solution. It does so by premixing a liquid binder with the metal powder to form a slurry, which can be 3D-printed directly and can be handled safely in an open environment.

After heat treatment in a furnace, the printed mixture dries by natural evaporation of the solvent. There is no need for high-powered lasers or extensive post-processing. The cost of the process is less than half that of conventional laser-based printers.

The project has garnered significant support from both government and industry. It has earned multiple awards and resulted in patent filings across various countries. A spin-off company, Solid Lab, will take the technology to market, in collaboration with UTAR researchers.

“Underpinned by solid engineering research, this project has opened the door to the technological potential of 3D-printing systems, while ensuring cost efficiency, reducing environmental impact and facilitating technology transfer to the local industry,” our judges said.

The panel was impressed by “the team’s commitment to creating a new breed of additive manufacturing and democratising it”.

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Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year

Singapore Management University (SMU)
Singapore

Situating learning in the real world is an effective way to prepare students for success beyond university. But the practicalities of moving teaching outside the lecture hall or laboratory can prove problematic.

Through close collaboration with industry, effective use of digital tools and faculty training, Singapore Management University (SMU) has met this challenge. The university's experiential learning framework, which spans undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, integrates academic and real-world experiences, enabling students to apply knowledge in practical settings. From a pilot of 58 students in two courses in 2015, it has grown to 40,000 enrolments in 170 courses a decade later.

The framework partners students with various organisations, from multinational corporations to start-ups, to tackle specific challenges that reflect evolving industry needs. By allowing students to work with peers across different disciplines, the projects encourage collaboration and cultivate the communication skills inherent to interdisciplinarity.

Academic mentors guide students on course theory while industry champions assess and report on project outcomes, combining academic and professional development. Virtual reality is used to develop project solutions, while other digital tools connect international partners and provide feedback and real-time performance data to students. Capitalising on the flexibility and reach of virtual tools, the experiential framework has been extended globally, exposing students to diverse markets and business practices.

Training is provided to staff guiding the experiential learning, and teaching insights are shared across schools through a learning community built around workshops, peer review and discussion forums.

"SMU fosters a sustainable ecosystem of learning and collaboration that strengthens university-industry synergy and drives continuous pedagogical improvement," our judges said.

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Technological or Digital Innovation of the Year

Chulalongkorn University
Thailand

Universities across the globe are experimenting with how best to incorporate emerging technologies into teaching, but Chulalongkorn University “impressed” judges with its MDCU MedUMORE online learning platform, which sought to address Thailand’s healthcare gap using accessible, cutting-edge technology.

The online platform – which offers personalised course recommendations, automated certification and immersive learning experiences through virtual reality and 3D animations that replicate real-life medical scenarios – has been designed to integrate learning more seamlessly into busy professional schedules.

The university said the platform was intended to aid Thailand’s healthcare system, which faces a shortage of healthcare professionals, and to “democratise medical education” by providing affordable and accessible content from leading experts to students and healthcare workers across the country.

Since its launch in 2022, it has gained considerable reach and influence throughout Thailand, and has registered more than 18,000 members from almost every medical and public health institution in the country. Its 3,000 medical learning resources have received more than 2.5 million views.

The judges said there was “strong support across the panel” for Chulalongkorn’s entry. They were impressed by how the technology – which includes mobile delivery, AI-enabled personalised learning and a content repository – “enables continuous learning and support for healthcare professionals”.

“The university has achieved scale and widespread usage well beyond its own needs, with clear impact on the wider healthcare profession in Thailand, thereby helping to address the significant shortage of healthcare professionals and to disseminate rapidly evolving medical knowledge in the field.”

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Congratulations to the winners and to all those shortlisted, whose stories you can read at theawardsasia.com

THE Awards Asia 2026 will open for entries in August this year – we look forward to your participation

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