

A change of guard



Out of the Box

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THE LATEST QS World University Rankings were announced at the beginning of June – and to little surprise, the United States and the UK continued their dominance as the homes to the world's top 100 universities (the United States has 31 while the UK has 16).

I have often said such “national” rankings are somewhat unfair to small cities such as Hong Kong.

Given our size and our population, it is simply impossible to compare us with countries as big as the United States.

In last year's QS rankings, Hong Kong co-ranked No 1 with London among cities hosting the most top 100 universities (four each).

This year, while both cities co-rank No 1 in hosting the most top 50 universities (four each), Hong Kong beats London by a hair as we now have five universities making the top 100 list to London's four.

This is quite a feat considering that our universities are relatively young. Hong Kong's reputation as a powerhouse in tertiary education is rising, and we should all be proud.

Universities in Hong Kong have always enjoyed the best of East and West. Internationalization is our calling card, and with it our universities have assembled a tremendous pool of talent, both faculty and students, from around the world.

Our universities also enjoy a high degree of academic freedom and autonomy, and again and again our research and citation rates have shown that we are a force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, while the UK is still a leader in tertiary education, most of its schools have seen their rankings drop lately.

Tuition fees in the UK have grown significantly in the past decade, and many have worried this will be a deterring factor when it comes to student recruitment.

The tightening up of immigration policy and Brexit have cast a cloud over the UK's future in research, as

the country is set to lose out on billions of pounds of funding from the European Research Council and other EU research bodies.

The United States too is falling victim to a tightened government budget, with President Donald Trump announcing rounds of cuts in research funding.

The outlook for both countries as global education leaders is indeed worrisome.

Australia is a popular pick by critics as an emerging education powerhouse, but its rise is not without its own concerns.

Their schools are doing well in areas such as teaching, research, and graduates' employment rates, but the government, while stable, is proposing its own budget cuts on education.

Will that limit the success of Australian universities?

Asia could also emerge as a candidate in the race, as 23 Asian universities have made the top 100 list, and most Asian governments are pouring in more money in education and research.

This could be a watershed moment in global education as we know it.

A change of guard is looming. The days where foreign schools always trump local ones may soon be history, but we must keep pushing ahead.