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Young universities

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The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) in Australia has taken a different path from many other institutions 50 years old or less, that are the focus of this supplement. This may be in part due to its origins, reports James Mitchell Crow, whose article on page S6 compares strategies between some of the fastest-rising young universities in the Nature Index.

Many young high-flyers were built from scratch with selected research teams. UTS by contrast is one of those formed by an amalgamation of teaching colleges that were previously dedicated solely to education. Most of the foundational staff had no research experience at all.

It is the right mix of agile and creative thinking, anchored to a clear roadmap for the future, that prepares such institutions to compete with their more established counterparts. For UTS, which is among the fastest-rising young universities for physical sciences and chemistry in the Nature Index, this meant developing a "strong framework around research centres, to get some concentrated effort and some critical mass", says Kate McGrath, its deputy vice-chancellor and vice-president (research). McGrath describes how this approach was extended across campus, with a strategic focus on growing high-quality research output.

For the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research in Bangalore, India, a plan to turbocharge scientific advancement in select areas and a shrewd approach to recruitment has been effective (see page S30). The centre was the sixth-fastest rising young university in the Nature Index 2019 to 2020, based on change in adjusted Share*.

Their goals may be different, but whether by careful identification of where they can make a unique contribution, highly targeted recruitment strategies, a large degree of freedom for researchers in their choice of topic, or all of the above, the universities featured here are proof that youth is no barrier to strong research performance.

Catherine Armitage
Chief editor, Nature Index

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Tanner Maxwell

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