UPES's Path to Excellence: Advancing Research, Innovation and Student Success

In an engaging discussion with Hyderabad Express, UPES Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Ram Sharma shares valuable insights about the university's remarkable achievements, global partnerships, future plans and more.

1. The university has made significant strides in the latest QS and THE World University rankings. What specifics and initiatives have you implemented that have driven this rise?

Our success in the QS and THE World University rankings is primarily due to our commitment to fostering a strong research ecosystem. We've strategically hired faculty with exceptional research credentials, both from India and abroad, who bring proven track records and strong academic pedigrees. We've invested heavily in research infrastructure, strengthened graduate and PhD programs, and encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration.

In addition, partnerships with globally renowned institutions and consortia, such as CERN and KEK, have further driven growth in the quality and quantity of our research output. For example, in 2020, around 18% of our research papers had international co-authors; today, nearly 50% do. Research suggests that such collaborations result in higher citation rates. It has positively impacted our rankings.

2. You have established partnerships with renowned global institutions. How have these collaborations helped and are there plans to further extend such partnerships?

UPES partners with global universities like UC Berkeley, University of Queensland, University of Edinburgh, University of Auckland, University of New South Wales, University of Bologna, and many others, offering joint research, dual degrees, and exchange programs. Key industry partners such as Bajaj, KPMG, IBM, Infosys, NASSCOM, Cisco, and Bosch, among others, provide valuable industry exposure and collaboration.

Our partnerships are designed to benefit both students and faculty. Students gain opportunities such as study abroad programs, semester exchanges, dual degree pathways, and access to cutting-edge curriculum. The faculty benefit from joint research initiatives, mobility programs, and joint PhD supervision.

These collaborations have significantly enhanced our research output and quality, with international partnerships directly contributing to improved citation rates. Moving forward, we aim to expand these alliances in diverse geographies, focusing on areas where mutual interests align and synergies exist.

3. What investments have been made in technology and infrastructure to support UPES's academic and research goals?

We've made significant strides in upgrading our technological and research infrastructure. This includes implementing an integrated Learning Management System (LMS) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, alongside the establishment of a high-end computing cluster to support data-driven research in AI, machine learning, and computational sciences. Our annual research budget has also grown approximately 100x from what it used to be in 2020. These investments underline our commitment to creating a robust academic and research environment.

4. Have there been any significant changes to the curriculum or teaching methodologies that have contributed to improved student outcomes?

Absolutely. Our curriculum undergoes regular updates, incorporating inputs from industry experts and leading academicians from top global institutions. We've integrated experiential learning methods, such as project-based learning, undergraduate research projects, field visits, and simulation exercises.

We've also made internships mandatory at the end of every year, with structured programs at every level: Srijan Social Internship in the first year, government or start-up internships in the second year, and industry internships in the third year. In the final year, students undertake a capstone project, which may focus on research, industry, or entrepreneurial ventures.

Moreover, through our School for Life initiative, we are the first university in India to formally integrate life skills such as empathy, teamwork, and adaptability into the curriculum for credits. This holistic approach has significantly enhanced student outcomes.

5. What are the university's goals moving forward to enhance its standing, what is your vision to achieve this?

At UPES, we prioritise our growth and continuous improvement over competing with others. Our journey focuses on three core pillars: research, rankings, and reputation. While we've made tangible progress in research and rankings, reputation-building takes time and requires sustained efforts.

To this end, we've adopted the philosophy of becoming a 'university for impact'. This encompasses several dimensions, including educational, research, innovation, economic, social, environmental, and policy impact. Each of these dimensions has well-defined metrics to ensure that we are consistently moving in the right direction.

Our vision is to focus on delivering an exceptional student experience and translating that into meaningful societal impact, ensuring that UPES remains at the forefront of academic and research excellence.

DR. RAM SHARMA,
Vice-Chancellor, UPES