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Milestones on the pathway to discovery

Often, research is stalled because funding is withdrawn or delayed, which can be rather frustrating to researchers. Unfortunately, funding can go through a lot of red tape and lobbying before it actually reaches the hands of researchers.

It is therefore imperative for universities to gain access to both federal and private funding – not just in terms of research grants, but also in terms of facilities and access to partnerships.

“We are very lucky that our Government is supportive of research through the various research grant schemes available from different ministries,” says Dr Ivan of IMU’s funding.

“The funding situation around the globe will not improve anytime soon and it is down to us to improve it. Research has always been fraught with challenges particularly with funding. The problem is not isolated to Malaysia but affects the whole world.”

For Prof Dr Siow Heng Loke, dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Asia e University, the challenges include many other matters that those outside the research field tend to forget. There are aspects such as “preparing the research proposal, gathering research team members, preparing reasonable costing for the research project as well as ensuring the research reports go out on time”.

Success breeds success

Determining the success of a piece of research is often not straightforward. Broadly, a piece of research is deemed a success once



There are many aspects to research, such as preparing a good research proposal and gathering the right team members.

it meets its outcomes and the conditions set by the institution where the research is being carried out.

“A successful project offers key findings relevant to making significant inroads into the development of a technology. This could also cover fundamental research projects seeking to investigate theories behind scientific phenomena. The university then ratifies successful projects after rigorous thesis

examination,” says Prof Danquah.

Other than reaching its research goals, scientists recognise the value or contribution of a piece of research to the scientific body of knowledge based on it being published in peer-reviewed journals as well as the references it gets from other researchers down the road.

Awards are another way to determine the success of a piece of research. For example, the work being carried out by Dr Roseline in

nutrigenetics was recognised with two international awards as it could be the first such research project involving the Malaysian population.

The research has also been published in one local and three international scientific journals and the project presented widely in several international conferences, particularly in Asia Pacific.

“IMU considers a project successful when the research goals are achieved within the stipulated

timeline supported by evidence of international Tier 1 and Tier 2 peer-reviewed publications and human capital development in the form of postgraduate students and development of new skill sets,” says Dr Ivan.

“We achieved our over-arching research goal of establishing the first systems biology model for understanding toxoplasmosis infection in mammalian hosts. The success of our research enabled us to progress further into establishing and understanding the pathophysiology of co-infection and we have just recently been awarded funding through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme from the Ministry of Education to look into the effect of multiple parasitic infections in the hosts,” he says.

Dr Ivan’s approach in his research can be applied to other models of infectious diseases to aid the understanding of host and pathogen interactions as well as to aid in the discovery of potential diagnostic and prognostic indicators.

The world that we live in will be very different if it were not for the never-say-die attitude of researchers across the globe who put blood, sweat and tears into their work.

If it is said philosophers rethink the world and engineers build it, then it is scientists who give us all the information – theories, experimental data, breakthroughs and discoveries – that we need to do all that thinking and building.

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