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Impact of Rankings on Higher Education - International and German Perspectives

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'The University itself is ranked among the top UK universities for the quality of its teaching'

'[Ireland] should aim to have two universities in the top 20 worldwide by 2013'

'You should hold a degree from a Times top 100 university ranked at no 33 or higher'

League Tables are 'dangerous, often ill-informed but difficult to influence and most definitely here to stay!'

Themes

1. Impact on HEIs: View of Institutional Leaders

2. Other Experiences, Actions and Reactions

3. Implications for Institutions and Higher Education

1. Impact on HEIs: View of Institutional Leaders

Difficulties with League Tables

- Technical and Methodological Difficulties
  - Indicators as proxies for quality?
  - Quality and appropriateness of the metrics
- Usefulness of the results as 'consumer' information
  - Rater bias? Halo effect? Reputational ranking?
  - Quality and appropriateness of the information
- Comparability of complex institutions
  - One-size-fits-all? Diversity of missions, complex organisations
  - Matthew effect?
- Influences on institutional decision-making and academic behaviour
  - Helping set strategic goals or encouraging HEIs to become what is measured?

Respondent Profile

International (N=202)

- Age:
    - 36% post 1970
    - 24% 1945-1969
    - 40% pre 1945
- 83% publicly funded
- Institutional type
    - 30% teaching intensive
    - 19% research informed
    - 29% research intensive

Germany (N= 49)

- Age:
    - 47% post 1970
    - 13% 1945-1969
    - 40% pre 1945
- 89% publicly funded
- Institutional type
    - 39% teaching intensive
    - 9% research informed
    - 22% research intensive

Purpose of Ranking

International

- Provide comparative information = <70%
- Target Audience:
  - Students = 54%
  - Public Opinion = 23%
- Users:
  - Students = 50%
  - Public Opinion = 12%
  - Government = 11%
  - Parents = 10%
  - Funding Agencies = 3%

Germany

- Provide comparative information = 70%
- Target Audience:
  - Students = 66%
  - Public Opinion = 18%
- Users:
  - Students = 62%
  - Government = 14%
  - Public Opinion = 8%
  - Parents = 5%
  - Funding Agencies = 2.7%

Ranking Status

International

- 58% not happy with current rank

  - 93% want to improve national rank;

  - 82% want to improve int'l rank

- 70% desire to be top 10% nationally

- 71% desire to be top 25% internationally

Germany

- 46% not happy with current rank

  - 94% want to improve national rank;

  - 79% want to improve int'l rank

- 70% desire to be top 10% nationally

- 60% desire to be top 25% internationally

Maintaining Position and Reputation

■ Rankings play a critical role in enabling/facilitating HEIs to maintain and build institutional position and reputation.

■ While answers dependent upon 'happiness with position',

  ■ Almost 50% Int'l/50% German HEIs use their institutional position for publicity purposes: press releases, official presentations, website.

■ 56% Int'l/53% German HEIs have formal internal mechanism for reviewing their position:

  ■ 56% Int'l/56% German: Vice Chancellor, President or Rector

  ■ 14% Int'l/6% German: Governing Authority

Help or Hinder?

International

- HELP
  - Institut'l Reputation 68%
  - Marketing/Publicity 65%
  - Student Recruitment 63%
- HINDER
  - Marketing 15%
  - Institut'l Reputation 14%
  - Student Recruitment 14%
  - Faculty Morale 12%
  - Faculty Recruitment 9%
  - Academic Partnerships 8%
  - Int'l Collaboration 6%

Germany

- HELP
  - Marketing/Publicity 81%
  - Student Recruitment 74%
  - Institut'l Reputation 67%
- HINDER
  - Academic Partnerships 7%
  - Institut'l Reputation 7%
  - Int'l Collaboration 7%
  - Faculty Recruitment 7%
  - Student Recruitment 7%
  - Faculty Morale 7%
  - Marketing 4%

Peer Benchmarking

International

- ~40% consider an HEIs rank before discussions:
    - Int'l Collaboration
    - Academic Programmes
    - Research
    - Student Exchanges

- 57% think LTRS influencing others partnering with them
- 34% think LTRS influencing membership of academic/professional bodies

Germany

- Over 39% consider an HEIs rank before discussions:
    - Int'l collaboration
    - Academic Programmes
    - Student Exchanges
    - Research/Nat'l Collaboration

- 60% think LTRS influencing others partnering with them
- 27% think LTRS influencing membership of academic/professional bodies

Influence on Key Stakeholders

	Examples
Benefactor	■ 'Depends on the rank' ■ 'They feel reassured supporting us' ■ 'Provides international comparators'
Collaborators	■ 'Depends on the rank' ■ 'Good for reputation' ■ 'We feel an improvement'
Current Faculty	■ 'Increases awareness about the importance of publishing' ■ 'Easier to induce improvement with the department head whose rankings are declining
Employers	■ 'They feel reassured' ■ 'Those not open to us become more receptive' ■ 'Can be confusing'
Funding Agencies	■ 'Impact on small part of indicators' ■ 'Have less pretexts to deny funding'
Future Faculty	■ 'Recruitment easier with good reputation'
Government	■ 'May believe simplistic picture' ■ 'Local government included to spend additional money for an excellent university'
Industry	■ 'Depends on the rank: good for reputation vs. less interest'
Parents	■ 'Particularly in an international market where status and prestige are considered in decision-making'
Partnerships	■ 'Good for reputation at international level'
Students	■ 'High profile students apply to high profile universities' ■ 'Influence at the margins'

Actions Arising (1)

- 63% Int'l/67% German respondents have taken strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions in response to the results

- Of those,

  - Overwhelming majority took either strategic or academic decisions and actions

  - Only 8% Int'l/14% German respondents indicated they had taken no action

Actions Arising (2)

	Examples
Strategy	■ 'Indicators underlying rankings are explicit part of target agreements between rector and faculties' ■ 'Have become part of a SWOT analysis ■ 'Organise benchmarking exercises'
Organisation	■ 'New section established to deal with indicator improvements and monitor rankings' ■ 'Reorganisation of structure' ■ 'Have organised investigation team'
Management	■ 'Rector enforces the serious and precise processing of ranking as well as control of the relevant indicators' ■ 'Development of better management tools'
Academic	■ 'Improve teaching and learning' ■ 'New academic programmes' ■ 'Increase English language programmes' ■ 'More scholarships and staff appointments'

Comparative Observations

International

- Happy with LTRS: 42% satisfied/58% unsatisfied
- LTRS Helpful: 65% w/ Marketing/Publicity; 63% Student Recruitment
- 69% believe most *positive* impact on students
- 19% believe most *negative* impact on parents
- 26% believe HEI classification most influential policy impact
- Greatest impact to 'favour established universities'
- 95% think Teaching Quality should be included

Germany

- Happy with LTRS: 54% satisfied/46% unsatisfied
- LTRS Helpful: 81% w/ Marketing/Publicity; 74% Student Recruitment
- 76% believe most *positive* impact on students
- 16% believe most *negative* impact on current faculty
- 30% believe HEI classification most influential policy impact
- Greatest impact to 'establish hierarchy' of HEIs
- 94% think Teaching Quality should be included

Ideal 'League Tables'

- Purpose?
  - Give fair and unbiased picture of strengths and weaknesses
  - Provide student choice for a programme and institution
  - Provide accountability and enhance quality
- Ideal Metrics?
  - Teaching quality
  - Employment
  - Student-staff ratio
  - Research, e.g. publications and income
- Who should develop?
  - Int'l respondents: Ind. Research Org, Accreditation Agency, NGO, Int'l Org
  - German respondents: Ind. Research Org, NGO, Accreditation Agency, HEI
- Unit of Analysis?
  - 41% institutional , 29% programme , 30% departmental level

3. Other Experiences, Actions and Reactions

Impact on Students & Recruitment

Evidence is limited, but trends appearing

- High rankings → rise in applications (*NY Times*, 2007)

- Rank important for US high-ability students (Griffith/Rask, 2007)

- UK, Germany and New Zealand (Clarke, 2007; Federkeil, 2002)

- Ranking important for international recruitment/mobile postgraduate market (EAIE)

Impact on Stakeholders

- US Governing Boards (Levin, 2002)

  - 75% pay attention to US N&WR

  - 68% Boards discuss rankings; 71% for half an hour or more.

- UK Employers favour graduates from more highly ranked HEIs (University of Sussex, 2006)

- State appropriations per student in public colleges are responsive to rankings (US) (Zhe Jin, 2007)

- Almost all universities chosen for Deutsche Telekom professorial chairs used rankings as evidence of research performance (Spiewak, 2005)

US HEI Views

Importance of Rankings:

- 76% somewhat or very important

- 51% attempted to improve their rankings

- 50% used rankings as internal benchmarks

- 35% announced results in press releases or on the web

- 4% established task force or committee to address rankings

- 20% ignored them

(Levin, 2002, p14)

US Institutional (re)Action

- University administrators: 'most engaged and obsessively implicated' (Keller, 2007)

- Recruit students who will be 'assets' in terms of maintaining and enhancing rank (Clarke, 2007)

- HEIs making extensive investments to influence 'student input' metric (Brewer et al, 2002)

  - 88% identified retention rates;

  - 84% alumni-giving;

  - 75% graduation rates;

  - 71% entry scores;

  - 63% faculty compensation;

  - 31% student-faculty ratio.

  - 25% improve educational expenditure

  - 7% improve research capacity (Levin, 2002)

3. Implications for Institutions and Higher Education

Observations (1)

- Rankings and League Tables have gained popularity because they (appear to) fulfil particular purposes and needs

- Accordingly, 'concerns' were easily ignored/shrugged off with reference to individual institution's score or broader objectives (e.g. benchmarking, strategic planning)

- International/German experience replicated by/through literature and earlier US study

- Increasing evidence suggests wider usage, impact and influence

Observations (2)

- Strong perception that benefits/advantages flow from high ranking

- Influence goes beyond 'traditional' student audience
    - Growing influence on public opinion, government and funders
    - Influence policymaking, e.g. classification of institutions, funding and accreditation

- HEIs taking results very seriously, and making changes
    - Embedding league tables within strategic decision-making
    - Making structural and organisational changes; shifting resources
    - Institutions behaving rationally – becoming what is measured

- Governments using Rankings as Policy Instrument/HEIs using Rankings as Management Tool

Implications (1)

- Enhancing Accountability and Transparency

    - Rankings taking on QA function but with *own* definition of quality

    - Worldwide comparisons more significant in the future

- Increasing vertical stratification w/ growing gap between elite and mass education

    - Greater demand for 'elite' HEIs and 'devaluing of others'

    - Public HEIs have hard time competing; what is the cost of repositioning an HEI?

    - Greater 'mission' convergence and undervaluing of institutional diversity

    - Despite support for inter-institutional collaboration, in a competitive environment, 'elite' institutions may see little benefit working with/helping 'lesser' institutions.

Implications (2)

- Re-structuring HE systems, nationally and internationally

    - Enhance Market Mechanisms and Global Competition

    - 'Development of single world market'

    - Geo-political implications for developed and developing economies/societies

- Pace of HR reform likely to quicken as governments believe reform will lead to more competitive and better (more highly ranked) HEIs

- Need for an appropriate public policy role in the development and distribution of rankings is critical

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