Impact of Rankings on Higher Education - International and German Perspectives

Ellen Hazelkorn
Technological University Dublin, ellen.hazelkorn@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cseroth

Part of the Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons, and the International and Comparative Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License
Impact of Rankings on Higher Education: International and German Perspectives

Ellen Hazelkorn
Director, and Dean of the Faculty of Applied Arts
Director, Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)
Dublin Institute of Technology

Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement: System Accreditation, Rankings, Learning Outcomes
HRK conference, Bonn
November 2007
'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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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’  |
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **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?**
  - 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 $\rightarrow$ 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
ellen.hazelkorn@dit.ie