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Rankings and Implications for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Ellen Hazelkorn

Technological University Dublin, ellen.hazelkorn@tudublin.ie

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Rankings and Implications for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Professor Ellen Hazelkorn

Vice President, Research and Enterprise, and Dean of the Graduate Research
School

Head, Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)

Dublin Institute of Technology

Exploring Quality Assurance through the Africa-EU Partnership

Policy workshop EU-Africa Joint Strategy

Gabon, May 2013



Pursuing Quality and Excellence

Do Rankings Measure Quality?

Using Rankings Strategically

1. PURSUING QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE



Pursuing Quality

- Quality and excellence are the main drivers impacting on and affecting higher education, nationally and globally;
- Recognition of key role higher education plays within society and as an economic driver;
- Quality assurance provides needed confidence for prospective students and employers;
- Growing necessity to regulate the marketplace;
- Society has a right to know whether its institutions are capable of meeting its expectations: value-for-money and investor-confidence.

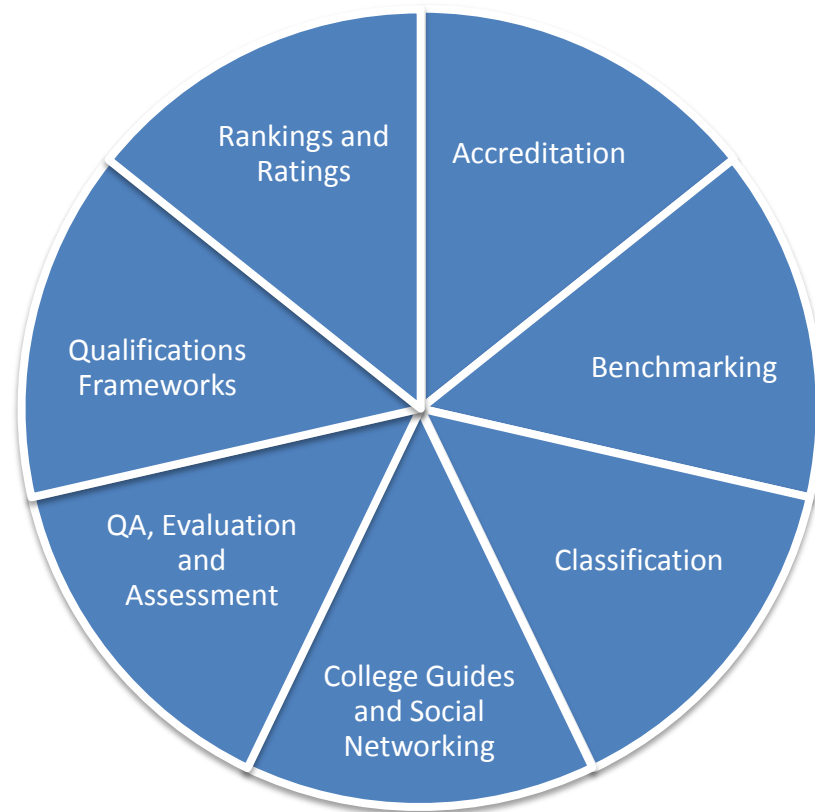
Quality is Concern for all Stakeholders

- National geo-political *positioning and pride*;
- Beacon to attract/retain *investment, business and talent*;
- Institutional *reputation and status*;
- Performance *assessment of scientific-scholarly research*;
- Graduate *capability and opportunities*;
- Link between qualification and *career opportunities and life-style*;
- Value-for-money and return-on-(public) *investment*;
- Growing importance of *global networks*.

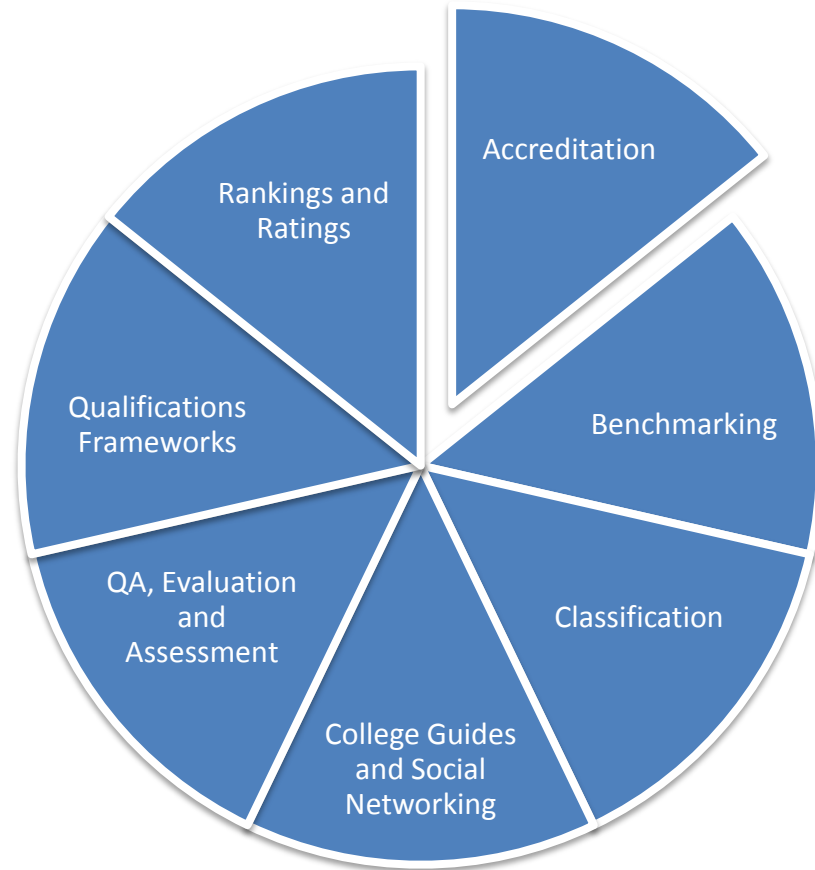
What is Quality?

- No internationally agreed definition of education quality;
- No objective or value-free set of indicators;
- Rather context is important:
 - Which university is best depends upon who is asking the question, what question is being asked and the purpose;
 - Different societies have different priorities, and higher education systems produce different results depending upon what is measured, and the purpose.

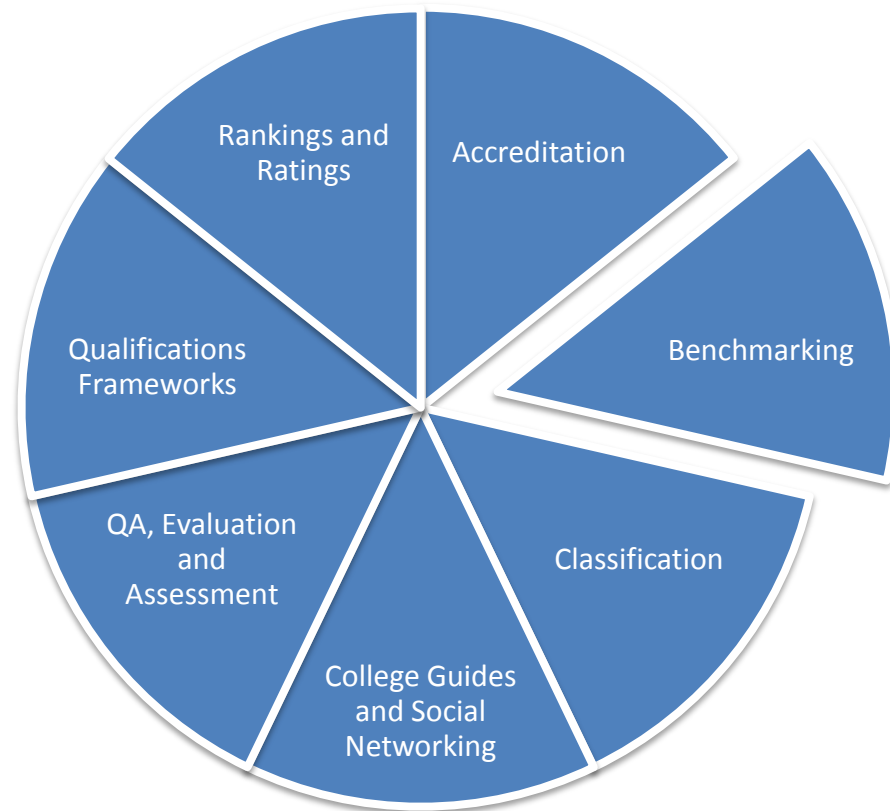
Transparency Instruments



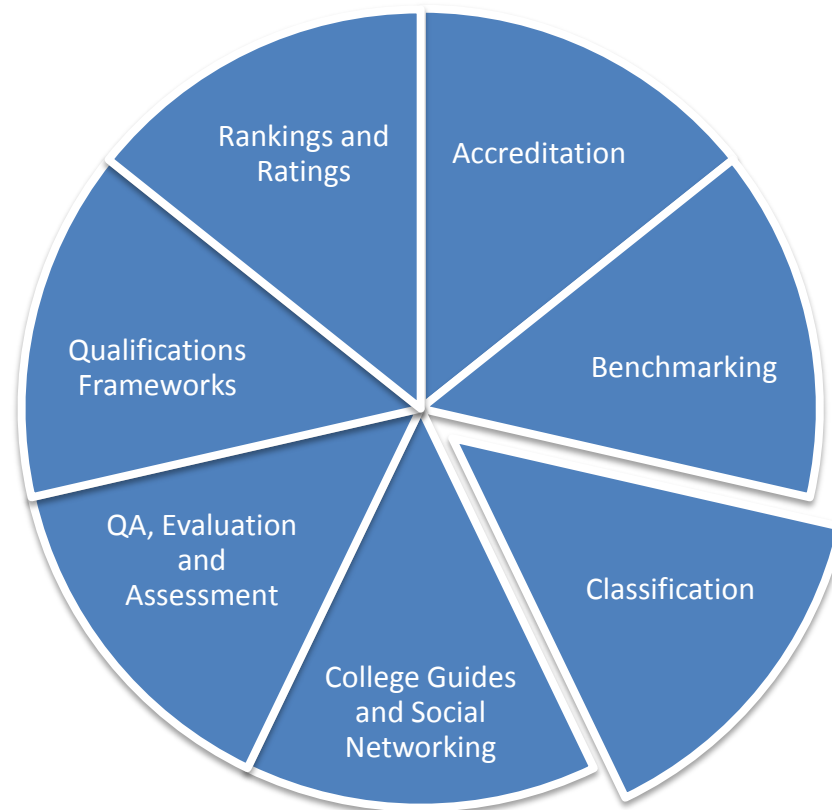
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Make an informed choice about your future! MyUniversity provides students with a broad range of information about Australian universities and other higher education providers. Click on the links below to start your search.

Course Search

Search thousands of Australian courses and compare details such as fee and entry requirements.

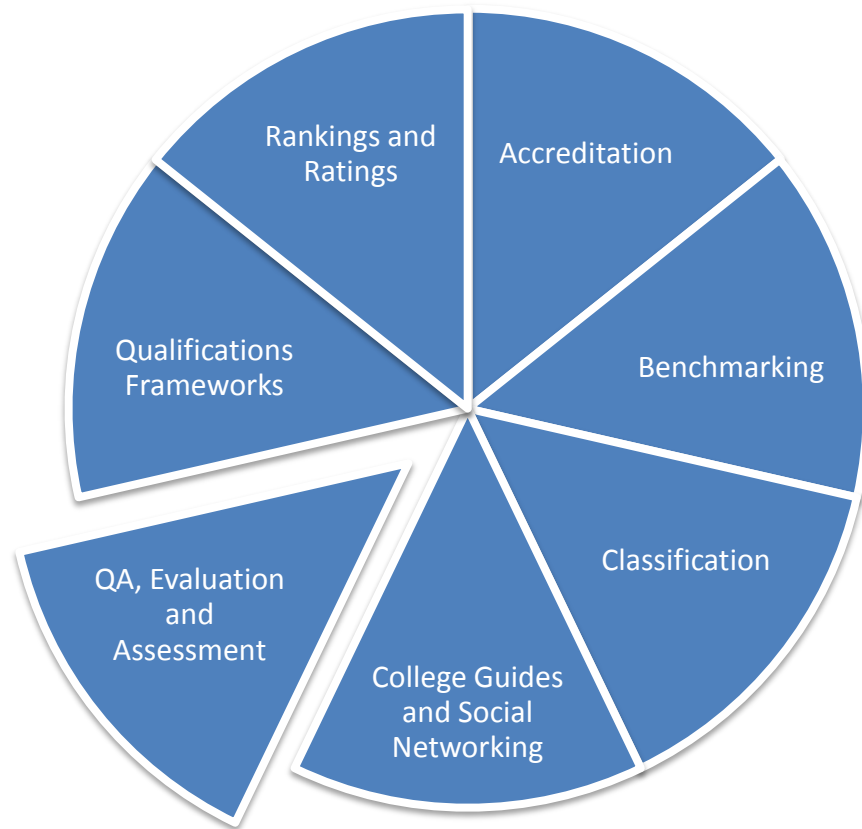
University Search

Search for and compare information on Australian universities. Find detailed statistical information and campus facilities here. Information on other higher education providers coming soon...

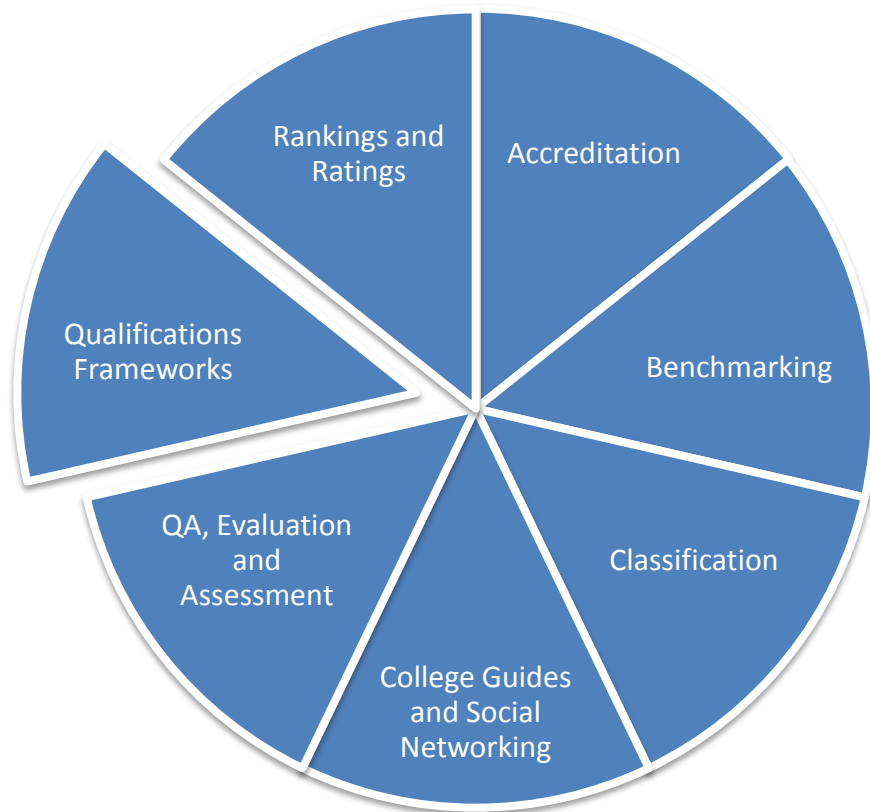
Postgraduate Research

Find information on starting a postgraduate research degree and search for information on research quality and activity.

Transparency Instruments



Transparency Instruments



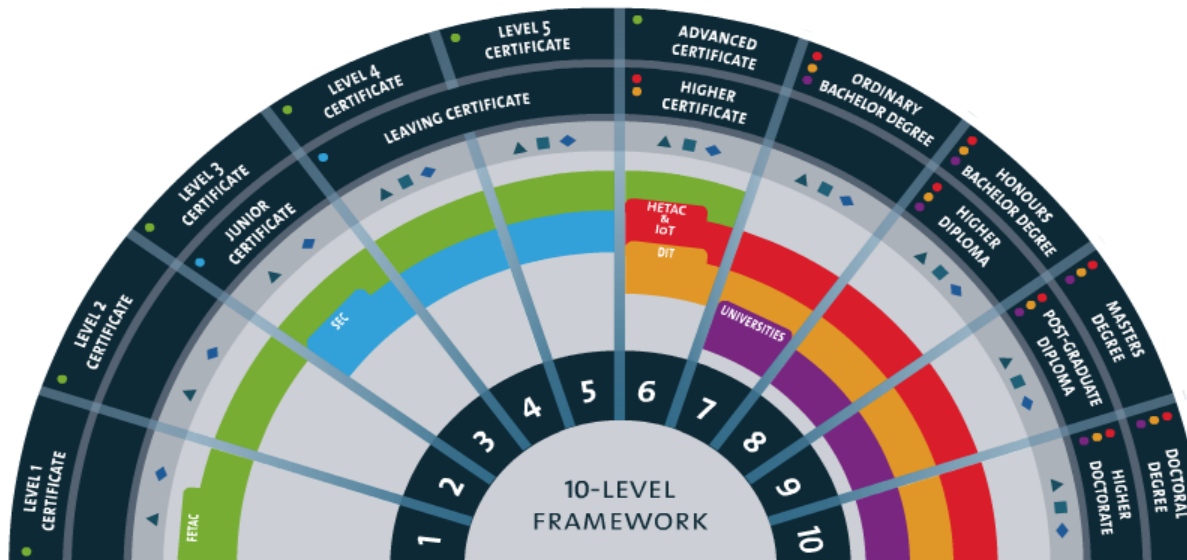
NATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF QUALIFICATIONS



WHAT ARE THE FRAMEWORK LEVELS?

WHAT IS AN AWARD -TYPE?

WHAT IS AN AWARING BODY?



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Transparency Instruments



2. DO RANKINGS MEASURE QUALITY?

Why Rankings

- Rankings **appear** to be a simple and easy way to measure and compare performance and productivity;
- Satisfy a "public demand for transparency and information that institutions and government have not been able to meet on their own" (Usher & Savino, 2006, p38);
- Global rankings reflect the realization that in a global knowledge economy, national pre-eminence is no longer enough;

How Rankings Work

- Compare institutions by using a range of indicators:
 - Indicators are chosen by the designers of each system;
 - Different indicators are weighted differently.
- Final score aggregated to single digit in descending order;
- Each indicator is considered independently from each other - with no consideration as to context, history, mission, etc.

Most Influential Rankings Today

- *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (Shanghai Jiao Tong University), 2003;
- *Webometrics* (Spanish National Research Council), 2003;
- *Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for Research Universities* (HEEACT), 2007;
- *Leiden Ranking* (Centre for Science & Technology Studies, U Leiden), 2008;
- *SCImago Institutional Rankings*, 2009;
- *Russian Global University Rankings*, 2009;
- *Turkish University Ranking by Academic Performance* (URAP) 2009;
- *Top University Rankings* (QS), 2010;
- *World University Ranking* (Times Higher Education/Thomson Reuters), 2010;
- *U-Multirank* (European Commission) 2014.

What Rankings Measure

Rankings Measure

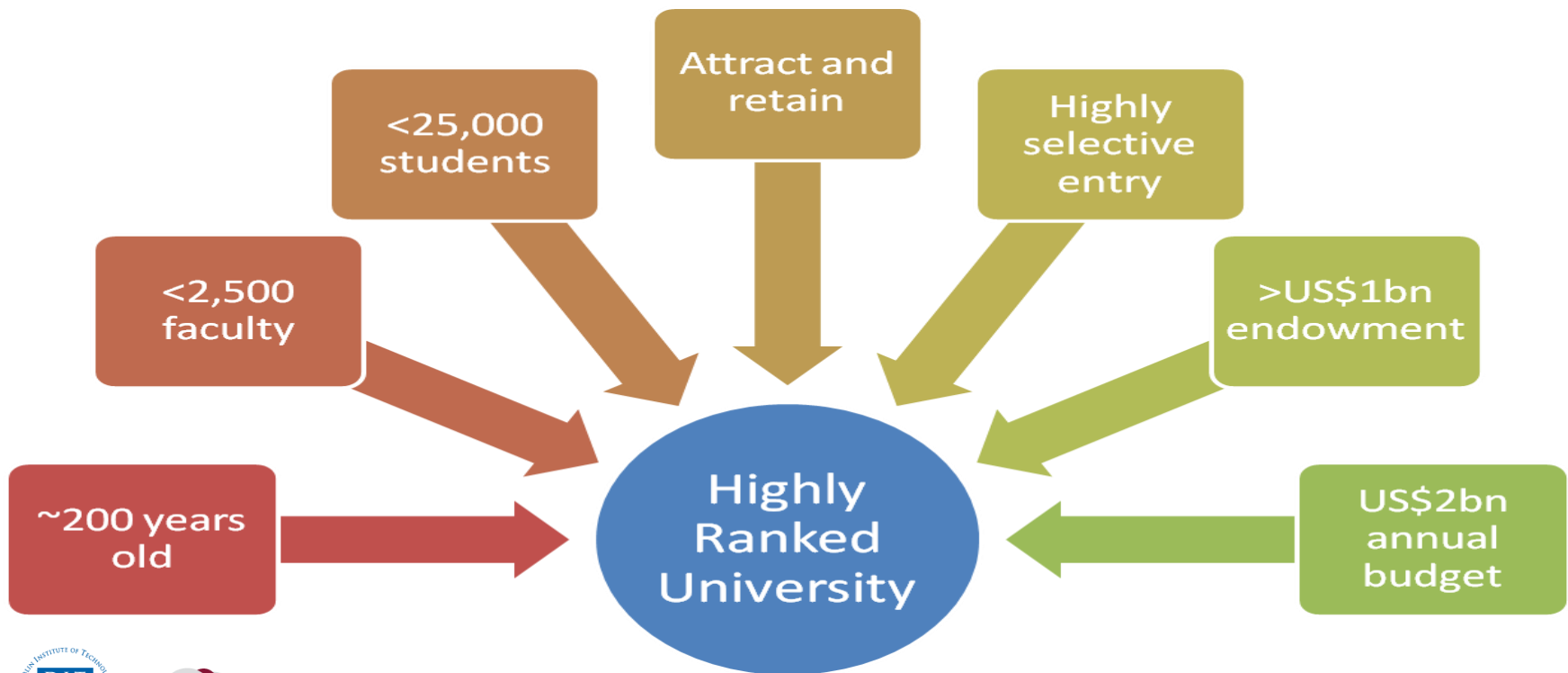
- Bio- and medical sciences Research
- Publications in *Nature* and *Science*
- Student and Faculty Characteristics (e.g. productivity, entry criteria, faculty/student ratio)
- Internationalization
- Reputation – amongst peers, employers, students

Rankings Do Not Measure

- Teaching and Learning, incl. "added value", impact of research on teaching
- Arts, Humanities and Social Science Research
- Technology/Knowledge Transfer
- Impact and Benefit of Research
- Regional or Civic Engagement
- Student Experience

What Global Rankings tell Us

Because age and size matters, there is a super-league of large, well-endowed, comprehensive universities, usually with medical schools and in English-language countries.



Do Rankings Measure What Counts? (1)

1. Measuring Student Entry Levels:

- Use national test scores etc. as proxy for educational quality;
- But entry scores simply reflect socioeconomic advantage – and say nothing about quality of higher educational experience itself.

2. Measuring Faculty/Student Ratio:

- Used as proxy for teaching quality;
- But different meanings for different disciplines and types of learning environments, and for public and private institutions and systems;
- Says more about the funding or efficiency level than teaching.

Do Rankings Measure What Counts? (2)

3. Measuring Resources:

- Used as proxy for quality of the learning environment, e.g. size of the budget or the library collection;
- But expenditure per student penalizes developing countries and new HEIs;
- Provides "little or no information about how often and how beneficially students *use* these resources".

4. Measuring Education Outputs:

- Focus on students who complete/graduate within the determined time-frame as a good measure of quality;
- Educational performance is influenced by many factors, including socio-economic profile of the student population.

Do Rankings Measure What Counts? (3)

5. Measuring Research Productivity:

- Counting peer publications and citations is most common method;
- But,
 - Main beneficiaries are physical, life, and medical sciences;
 - Emphasis on international peer-reviewed articles can ignore national/regionally important research;
 - English language bias disadvantages countries where English is NOT native language;
 - Ignores social and economic value and benefit of research via knowledge and technology transfer.

Do Rankings Measure What Counts? (4)

6. Measuring Reputation:

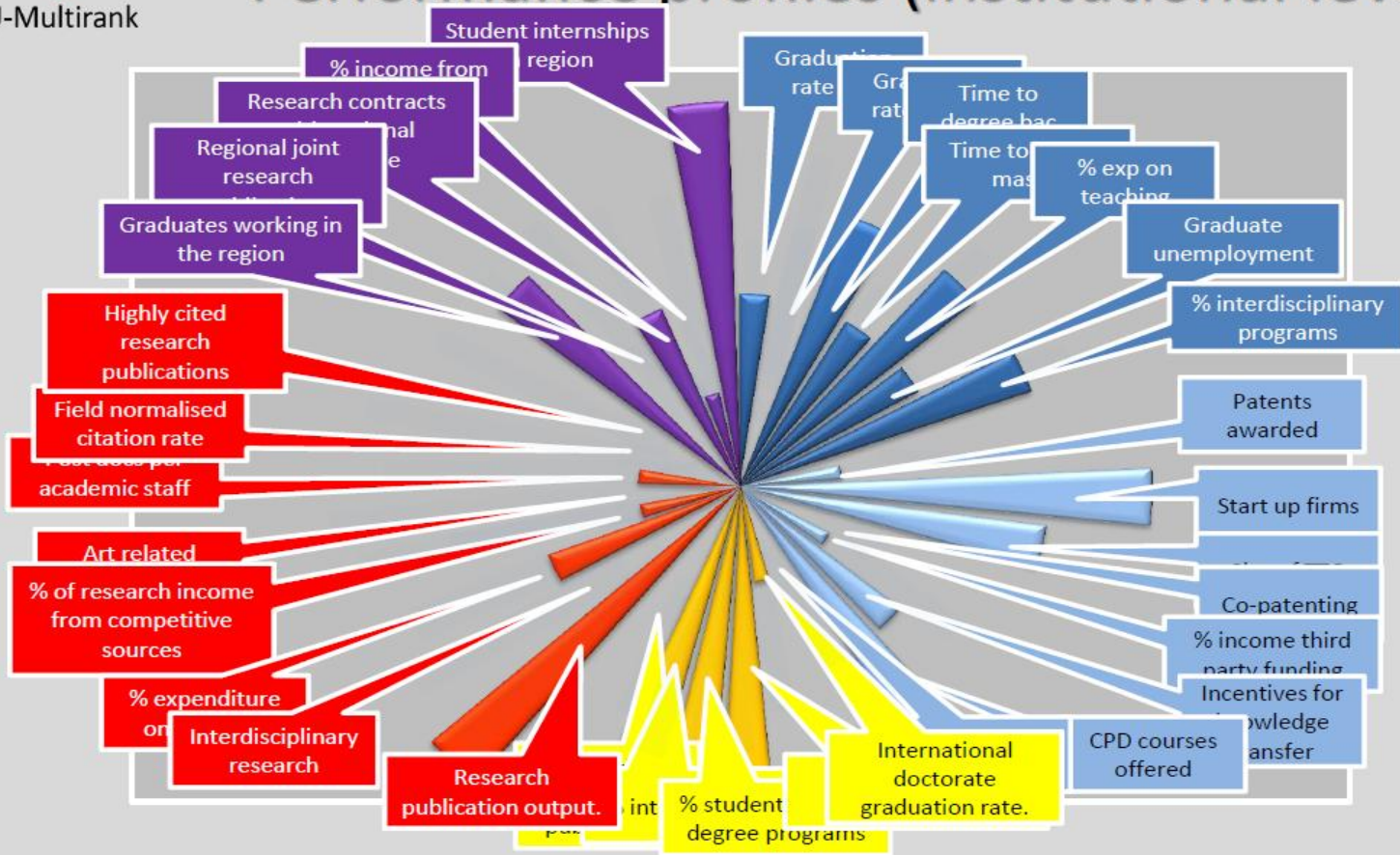
- Survey of academic peers, students, or industry stakeholders;
- But:
 - Reputational surveys are subjective and self-perpetuating;
 - Benefits older institutions in developed countries and global cities with which there is an easy identification;
 - Not possible to assess teaching quality, especially at the international level, via reputational surveys;
 - Overestimation "related to good performance in the past, whereas underestimation may be a problem for new institutions without long traditions".

Alternative Rankings

- *Multidimensional Rankings*: user-driven whereby each individual or stakeholder group can rank according to his/her own preferences according to different characteristics, e.g. ***U-Multirank***.
- *System-level Rankings* assess quality, impact and benefit of HE system as-a-whole using broad set of indicators, e.g. investment, access and participation rates, contribution of higher education and research to society, internationalisation, government policy and regulation, e.g. ***Universitas 21, Lisbon Council***.



Performance profiles (institutional level)



3. USING RANKINGS STRATEGICALLY



Why Compare Higher Education?

- Good quality, international comparative information is essential to underpin strategic leadership and decision-making at the national and institutional level;
- Enable countries/universities to gain a greater understanding of their own situation by learning from/sharing experience and “good practice”.
- Comparable information on HEIs, teaching & research makes it easier for students and researchers to make informed choices on where and what to study and where to work;
- Improved data-based or evidence-based decision-making can prompt discussions about what constitutes success and encourage benchmarking to identify and share best practices.

Rankings' Legacy

- Rankings **purport** to measure higher education quality, but
 - Focus on *limited set of attributes* for which (internationally) comparable data is available
 - Assumes the indicator is a meaningful measure of quality
- **Nonetheless**, they have succeeded in:
 - Acting as a wake-up call about the *value of higher education*
 - Placing consideration of HE quality within *wider comparative and international framework*
 - Challenging self-perceptions. No more self-declaration
- With the onslaught of global rankings, the **HE world has become more competitive and multi-polar.**

Unintended Consequences

- Used to set national priorities and institutional strategies:
 - There are 15,000+ HEIs worldwide. But rankings concentrate on the top 100 or less than 1%;
 - Focus on “world-class university” rather than “world class system” can undermine national or regionally strategic priorities and capacity for the knowledge society;
 - Disproportionate emphasis on research can undermine teaching and learning;
- Other uses:
 - Accreditation and classification of HEIs;
 - Immigration and scholarship criteria;

Dos and Don'ts

Don't

- Change national policies or institutional priorities to conform to rankings;
- Use rankings to inform resource allocation decisions;
- Manipulate your data in order to rise in the rankings.

Do:

- Ensure national policy and institutional priorities meet societal needs;
- Provide good information to underpin strategic decision-making and to stakeholders;
- Use rankings **only** as part of an overall quality assurance, assessment or benchmarking system and not as a stand-alone evaluation tool;
- Ensure policymakers, the public and the media understand the limitations of rankings.

Because rankings incentivise behaviour...

- Governments should stop obsessing about global rankings and the top 1% – they risk subverting other policy objectives in order to conform to indicators designed by others for other purposes. It is an abdication of national sovereignty;
- Quality is based more on what institutions do – rather than what they are called;
- Profiling and benchmarking should be used to improve the capacity and quality of the whole system – not simply reward the achievements of elites and flagship institutions.

Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)
Dublin Institute of Technology

ellen.hazelkorn@dit.ie

<http://www.dit.ie/hepru/>



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Discussion

- How much attention should universities or their governments pay to rankings?
- How can rankings aid strategic thinking?
- What kind of information should a university provide to its various stakeholders?
- If the current rankings are inappropriate, which other formats or transparency instruments might be more useful?
- Which indicators would be most/more helpful for measuring higher education quality or your university in particular?