Rankings and Institutional Strategies and Processes

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Themes

• Putting Rankings In Context: Global Drivers
• Evolution of Rankings
• What International Research Tells Us
• European Responses
• Measuring Quality
1. Putting Rankings in Context: Global Drivers
Where it all began...

No-one predicted global rankings would become the game-changer they have become, setting the cat among the pigeons.

Immediately – and subsequently – attracted attention of policymakers and the academy:

- Choice of indicators has set parameters for what constitutes quality;
- Visible measure of global competitiveness and multi-polar character;
- “Top 100” has transformed “world-class” into a strategy, a language, a topic of study;
- Has driven profound transformation (experimentation) of our HEIs and HE systems;
- HE/R&D investment is now high on political and policy agenda.

Today, less about student choice and more about geo-political positioning. And in the process, a whole industry has been created.
In the meantime...

Backdrop of last decade critical to understanding significance and impact:

- Early years associated with tail-end of long period of economic growth driven by unregulated finance capital;
- Latter years marked by lingering effects of the 2008 GFC.
  - OECD countries experienced steepest decline in growth in 60 years;
  - Developing countries growing on average 5.6% (2012) and 5.9% (2013).
- Noticeable shifts in “world order” and intensification of competition for a greater share of mobile capital and talent;
  - Significant demographic changes;
  - R&D investment patterns and geographic imbalances.
- Explains why global rankings have assumed such significance at a geo-political level.
Drivers of Change (1)

1. Knowledge as foundation of economic, social and political power:
   – Successful economies rely on ability to develop and exploit new knowledge for competitive advantage and performance;
   – This places higher education at the centre of policymaking;
   – Because higher education plays a fundamental role in creating competitive advantage in market environment, investment and performance matters.

2. Countries dependent upon talent, but many under demographic pressure:
   – World population increasing, but population of more developed regions dependent on net migration;
   – This challenges strategies for growing knowledge-intensive industries;
   – Governments introducing policies to attract most talented migrants and students, especially in science and technology.
Drivers of Change (2)

3. Higher education is essential component of the productive economy:
   – How higher education is governed and managed is a major policy issue;
   – Quality and status indicates a country’s ability to participate in world science and compete successfully in the global economy;
   – Increasing emphasis on value-for-money, international benchmarking, and (public) investor confidence.

4. Students (and their parents) are savvy consumers:
   – Education and graduate outcomes and lifestyle are strongly correlated with higher qualifications and career opportunities;
   – Students assess institutions and programmes as an opportunity-cost;
   – Decline in the traditional student market has heightened competition for high-achieving students – the balance of consumer power is shifting.
2. Evolution of Rankings
4 Phases

**Phase 1 (1900 -1950s) Beginnings**
- Focused “distinguished persons” via looking at academic origins, e.g. characteristics such as nationality, birthplace and family;
- Excluded most public universities as they were newer with different mission than older private universities.

**Phase 2 (1959 – 2000) National Rankings**
- Emphasis on reputational factors began to dominate relied on the *Citation Index*;
- Response to mobility, aspirant middle class and ideological shift towards markets;
  - Began as reputation survey of 1,300 presidents;
  - In 2013: 18.9m page views and 2.6m unique users.
- *CHE Universityranking* (1997)
  - Uses web-based technologies to facilitate personalization or customization
4 Phases

**Phase 3 (2003-) Global Rankings**
- Shanghai ranking created to highlight position of Chinese universities vis-à-vis competitor universities in response to the government’s desire to establish world-class;
- Has become “gold standard” – with many of the advantages associated with “first mover”.

**Phase 4 (2008-) Supra-national Rankings**
- Supra-national authorities (EU U-Multirank; OECD AHELO; US federal government Postsecondary Institution Rating System) marks significant paradigm shift
- Governments compelled to step-in to regulate the marketplace – arguably issues of global economic security;
  - Education recognized as globally traded service under GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services)
Most Influential Rankings Today

- Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China), 2003
- Webometrics (Spanish National Research Council, Spain), 2004
- National Taiwan University Rankings (formerly Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for Research Universities, HEEACT), 2007
- Leiden Ranking (Centre for Science & Technology Studies, University of Leiden), 2008
- SCImago Journal and Country Rank (SJR) (Spain), 2009
- University Ranking by Academic Performance (URAP) (Informatics Institute of Middle East Technical University, Turkey), 2009
- QS World University Rankings (Quacquarelli Symonds, UK), 2010
- THE World University Ranking (Times Higher Education, UK), 2010
- U-Multirank (European Commission, Brussels), 2014
- Best Global Universities rankings (USNWR, US), 2014
Measuring an Elite

- 18,000 HEIs worldwide – and growing;
- 160m total post-secondary students worldwide – and rising.

**BUT**

- Rankings concentrate on top 100 = .5% of total number of HEIs
- 34 Top European HEIs = 0.2% of total world HEIs
- Across 27 European countries 20m students but rankings reflect only 4% of worldwide students
3. What International Research Tells Us
What have we learned

Rankings are driver of higher education decision-making at the institutional and national level;

- Highlights ambition and sets explicit strategic goal;
- Identifies KPIs used to measure performance and reward success;
- Rankings help identify under-performers and "reputational" disciplines.

Students, high achievers and international, use rankings to inform choice;

Other HEIs use rankings to identify potential partners or membership of international networks;

Employers and other stakeholders use rankings for recruitment or publicity purposes;

Governments policy is increasingly influenced by rankings.
Who uses Rankings

Students, public opinion and government are **biggest users of rankings** & more likely to be negatively influenced

- Domestic undergraduate students
- Internationally mobile students and faculty
- Postgraduate students
- Government/Policymakers
- Academic partners and academic organisations
- Employers
- Sponsors, philanthropists and private investors
- Industrial partners
- The public and public opinion
- Ranking agencies/organisations
Rankings as Strategic Planning

1) Rankings as an explicit goal:
   – Plans make specific references to rankings, with targets often oriented toward gaining or maintaining positions within certain tiers.

2) Rankings as an implicit goal:
   – No specific reference to rankings, but desire to be recognised among the world’s best institutions or in the top tier is frequently expressed.
   – ‘World class’ code for global rankings.

3) Rankings for target setting:
   – Use rankings as a KPI to measure performance and set specific targets.

4) Rankings as a measure of success:
   – Used to validate particular strategies or actions.
Institutional Reaction: Some Findings

- 83% HEIs unhappy with their rank compared with 58 percent in 2006;
- 32% HEIs want to be first nationally compared with 19 percent in 2006;
- 29% HEIs want to be in the top 5% internationally compared with 24 percent in 2006;
- 84% HEIs have a formal internal mechanism to review their institution’s rank, and 40% - this is led by Vice Chancellor, President or Rector;
- Overwhelming majority HEIs use rankings to inform strategic decisions, set targets or shape priorities, and inform decisions about international partnerships;
- 84% HEIs use rankings to monitor peer institutions in their own country, and ~77% monitor peers worldwide;
Student Reaction: Some Findings

- 80% undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) students have a high interest in rankings, with no real difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students (i-graduate, 2014);

- High achieving and high socio-economic students are most likely to make choices based on non-financial factors, e.g. reputation and rankings;

- International students continue to rate reputation and position in rankings as key determinants in their choice of institution, programme and country;

- Strong correlation between rankings, perceptions of quality, institutional reputation and choice of destination, at the national and institutional level;
4. European Responses
European Study - RISP

Project

- Co-ordinated by European University Association in co-operation with Dublin Institute of Technology, French Rectors’ Conference and Academic Information Centre;
- Co-funded by EC’s Lifelong learning programme.

Key objectives

- Gain a deep understanding of the impact and influence of rankings on European higher education and institutional strategic decision-making;
- Identify how HEIs use rankings and similar transparency tools as a strategic tool and/or to promote institutional development.
Does Your Institution Monitor Its Position In Rankings?

N = 171

- 46% Yes, at institutional level
- 39% Yes, at faculty, department or programme level
- 13% Yes, at both levels
- 1% I don’t know
- 1% No
Who Monitors Rankings

A board, senate or equivalent governing body at the level of the institution: 31%

The rector, president, vice-chancellor or equivalent: 54%

The head of administration or equivalent highest administrative position: 3%

Committees or working groups at institutional level: 5%

The dean or equivalent leader at faculty, department, programme, centre or institute level: 3%

Committees or working groups at faculty, department, programme, centre or institute level: 1%

Other: 3%

N = 147
## Reasons For Monitoring Other Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for monitoring other institutions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark purposes (compare yourself to other institutions) at national level</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark purposes at international level</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing/maintaining national collaborations</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing/maintaining international collaborations</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing/maintaining staff exchange</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing/maintaining student exchange</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 137. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents to this question could indicate multiple replies.
## Process for Monitoring Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process for monitoring rankings</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a specialist unit/section of the institution which monitors our position in the rankings regularly.</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have one or several persons at institution level who monitor(s) our position in the rankings regularly.</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have one or several persons at study field, department or programme level who monitor(s) our position in the rankings regularly.</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We occasionally look into rankings to inform strategic decisions or for precise purposes, but not in a systematic way.</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are discussion platforms (committees, meetings…) organised at institutional level, where the issue of rankings is discussed on a regular basis.</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are discussion platforms (committees, meetings…) organised at faculty, department or programme level, where the issue of rankings is discussed on a regular basis.</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Groups Most Influenced By Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospective students</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective researchers</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner or prospective partner institutions</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry or authority in charge of higher education</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective teaching staff</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactors, sponsors, investors</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding bodies or similar organisations</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/local authorities or similar agencies</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 171. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents to this question could indicate multiple replies.
Students Most Influenced by Rankings

- **International non-European students**
  - Other (professional studies, lifelong learning provision...): 24%
  - Entering doctoral level: 81%
  - Entering Master level: 86%
  - Entering Bachelor level: 67%

- **European students**
  - Other: 23%
  - Entering doctoral level: 71%
  - Entering Master level: 79%
  - Entering Bachelor level: 59%

- **National students**
  - Other: 24%
  - Entering doctoral level: 59%
  - Entering Master level: 71%
  - Entering Bachelor level: 65%

- **Local students**
  - Other: 23%
  - Entering doctoral level: 47%
  - Entering Master level: 50%
  - Entering Bachelor level: 46%

N = 133. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents to this question could indicate multiple replies.
Monitoring Ranking of Other/Peer Institutions

- **39%** Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions abroad
- **29%** Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions in our country
- **5%** No
- **7%** We are planning to do it

N = 171
Rankings’ Role In Institutional Strategy

- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in national rankings.
- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in international rankings.
- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target for both national and international rankings.

N = 171
Rankings for Strategic, Organisational, Managerial or Academic Action

- Yes: 39%
- No: 29%
- We are planning to do it: 32%

N = 171
# Actions Taken Because of Rankings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions taken</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was no influence.</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies have been revised.</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal procedures remained the same, but a new focus was given to specific features.</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some research areas have been prioritised.</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and promotional criteria have been changed.</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal procedures have been revised.</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource allocation switched/changed.</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe it happens, but cannot really tell how.</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some departments/entities/programmes have been established.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student entry criteria have been revised.</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some departments/entities/programmes have been closed or merged.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a merger with an external entity (other HEI, research institute…).</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Rankings Affect Reputation?

- 63% in a generally positive way
- 25% in a generally negative way
- 7% no impact
- 5% I don’t know, I could not tell

N = 171
Rankings For Marketing Or Publicity

- Yes, always: 30%
- Occasionally: 46%
- Only if the position has changed from previous editions: 4%
- No: 20%

N = 171
5. Measuring Quality
Changing how we think about HE

- With onslaught of global rankings, HE world has become more competitive and multi-polar;
  - Cross-national/jurisdictional comparisons inevitable by-product of globalization and will intensify in the future;
  - Place HE quality within wider comparative and international framework;

- Create sense of urgency and accelerating modernisation agenda;
  - Driving up institutional performance and providing some public accountability and transparency;
  - Pushing HE to focus on quality and accurate data collection/benchmarking;

BUT:

- Would debate about quality have happened otherwise?
Would debate on quality happened otherwise?

- Academy has been slow to engage meaningfully in discussion about quality;
  - Need to move beyond self-declaration to external verification;
  - Efforts at obfuscation, “gaming” and boycott have not helped.
- Information deficit created opportunities for the public and governments – but especially commercial interests – to define quality for their own purposes;
- Lots of “good practice” but no agreed definition and difficult to compare across jurisdictions across teaching, research and engagement:
  - Cross-jurisdictional comparisons remain but social-networking/new formats pose challenges for HE as it places control into user’s hands;
  - Likelihood of international data set on HE, e.g. OECD, ETER
Measuring Quality

• Rankings have been the dominant instrument but there are a range of other tools being developed:
  - Alternative rankings by competitors, as new products and services;
  - Alternatives to rankings by governments, agencies, HE, and others.

• Traditionally, quality was measured in input (e.g. student entry, academic qualifications, budget/income, library resources) and reputation;

• Today, focus on outcomes, outputs, impact, benefit and relevance via agreed explicit performance requirements:
  - Increasing attention being given to “added value” and “learning gain”;

• Greater number of players: supra-national governments, national governments/US states, HE agencies, commercial media, HE organisations;

• Shows different ways to measure quality.
Alternatives to Rankings

- **Accreditation**: certifies legitimacy of a particular HEI including the authority to award qualifications, either directly or via another agency;
- **Benchmarking**: systematic compares practice/performance with peer HEIs/nations to manage strategically, effectively and efficiently;
- **Classification and Profiling**: provides typology or framework of higher education institutions to denote diversity according to mission and type;
- **College guides**: fulfils public service role, helping and informing domestic undergraduate students and their parents;
- **Assessment, Quality Assurance (QA) and Evaluation**: assesses quality of research and/or teaching & learning, sometimes using student surveys;
- **Qualifications Frameworks**: provides integrated approach to learning, forming a single hierarchy of different qualifications, usually from primary to doctoral level;
- **Ratings and Banding**: assesses according to particular characteristics which form a threshold of achievement;
- **Social Networking**: uses on-line tools to share and display information.
New Developments

- **National and Regional Rankings**: either promoted by governments or ranking organisations (Asia, South America, Maghreb, BRICS, India)
- **System Rankings**: assesses quality, impact and benefit of HE system as a whole;
- **Assessment of Learning Outcomes**: Influence of Bologna has focused attention on outputs of learning, but increased attention on measuring results in response;
- **Student Engagement Survey**
- **Learning Gain/Added Value**
- **College Ratings and Paying for Performance (US)**
  - **Access**, such as percentage of students receiving Pell grants
  - **Affordability**, such as net price and loan debt
  - **Outcomes**, such as graduation and transfer rates, earnings of graduates, and completion of advanced degrees.
Conclusion

• Rankings have acted like a “wake-up call”
  – International and national competition
  – Necessity to enhance institutional intelligence
  – Evidence-base for strategic decision-making

• While rankings are criticised for their methodological flaws, HEIs do pay attention to them;

• Given importance of higher education to global economy, cross-national comparisons are inevitable and will only increase;
EUA study: www.eua.be/risp

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