Rankings and Institutional Strategies and Processes

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EQAF Conference
Barcelona, November 2014

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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;

- *U.S. News and World Report* Best College Rankings (*1983*)

    - 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

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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;

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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;
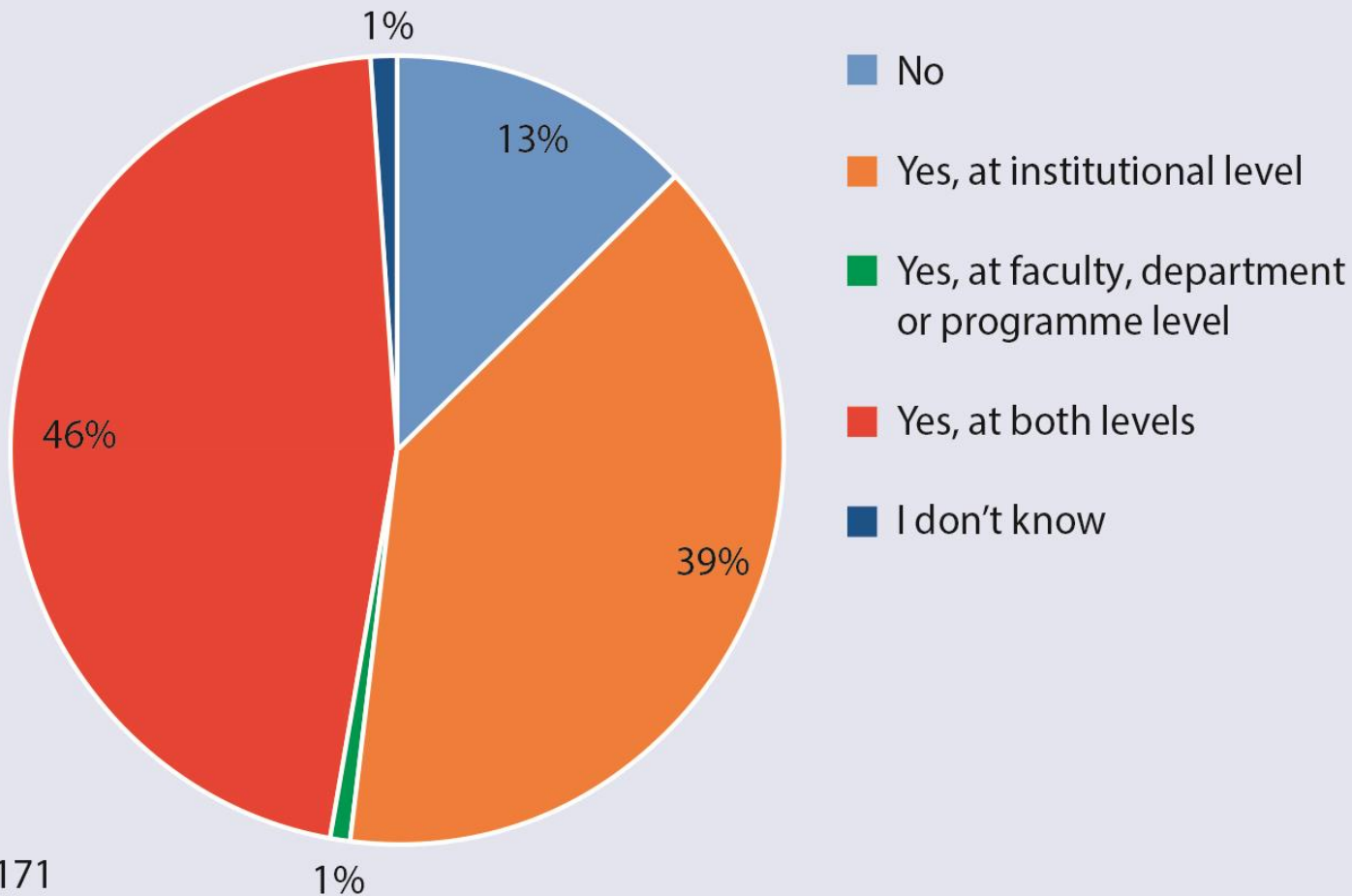
4. European Responses

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;

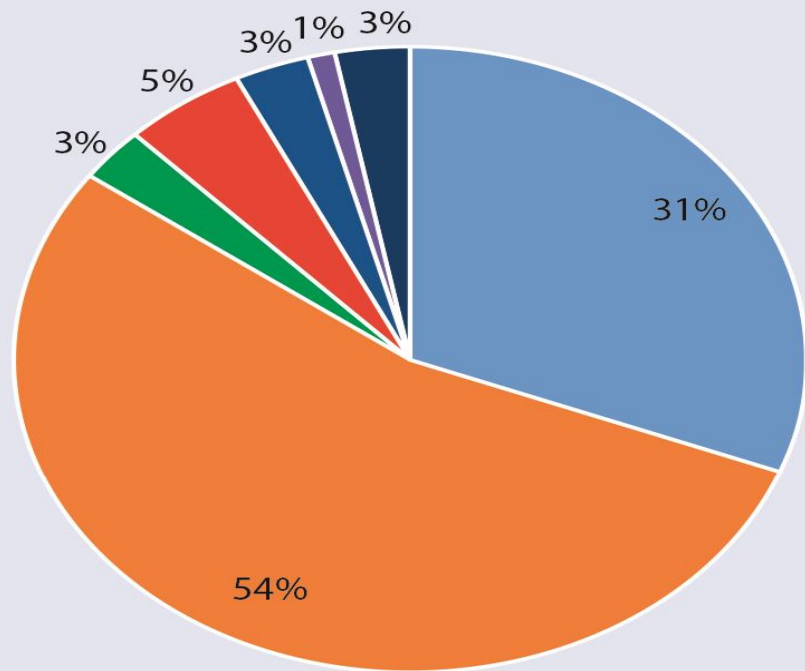– Co-funded by EC's Lifelong learning programme.

˝ 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?

- No — 13%
- Yes, at institutional level — 39%
- Yes, at faculty, department or programme level — 1%
- Yes, at both levels — 46%
- I don't know — 1%

N = 171

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%

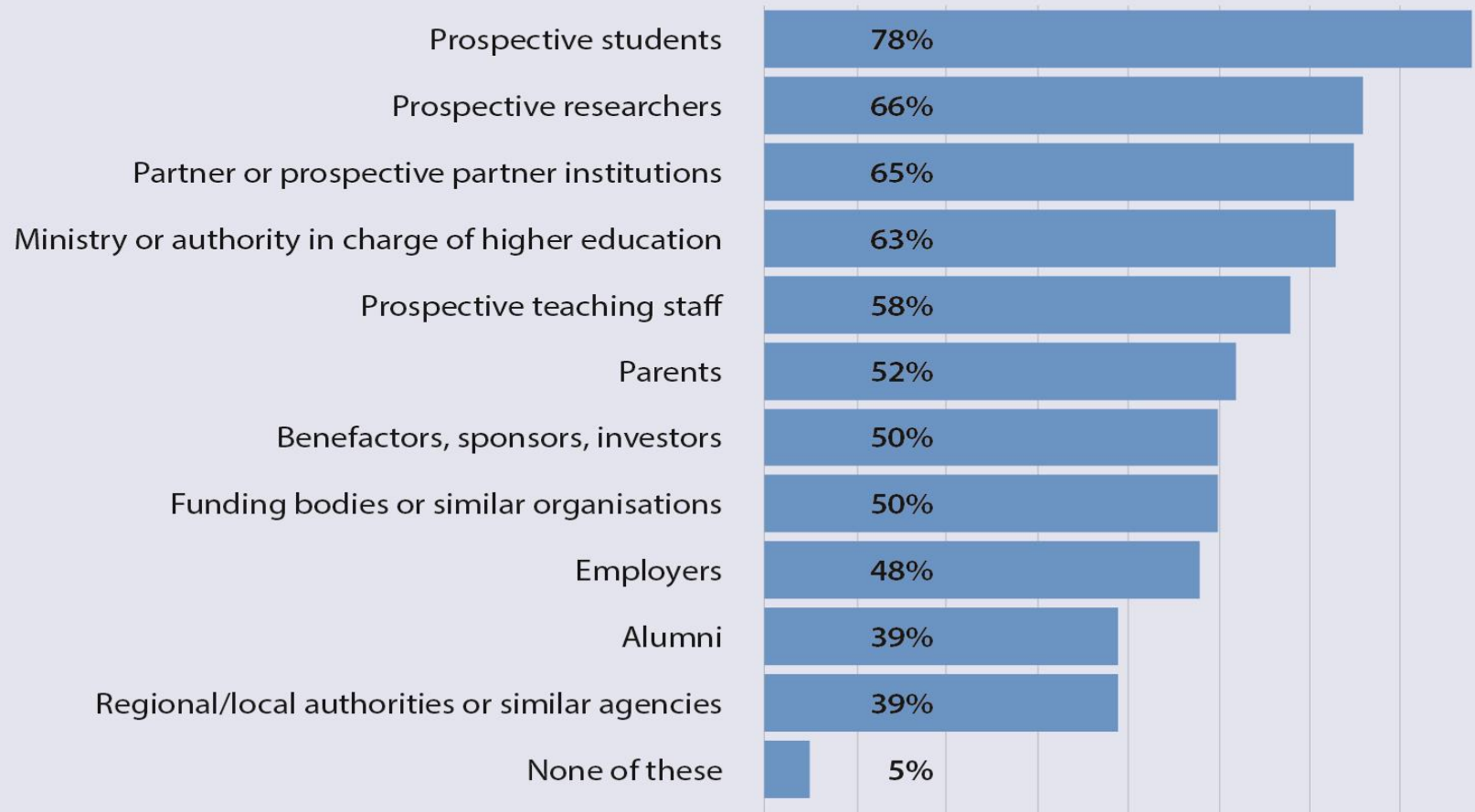N = 147

Reasons For Monitoring Other Institutions

Reason for monitoring other institutions	
Benchmark purposes (compare yourself to other institutions) at national level	84%
Benchmark purposes at international level	75%
Establishing/maintaining national collaborations	23%
Establishing/maintaining international collaborations	56%
Establishing/maintaining staff exchange	28%
Establishing/maintaining student exchange	37%
Other	2%

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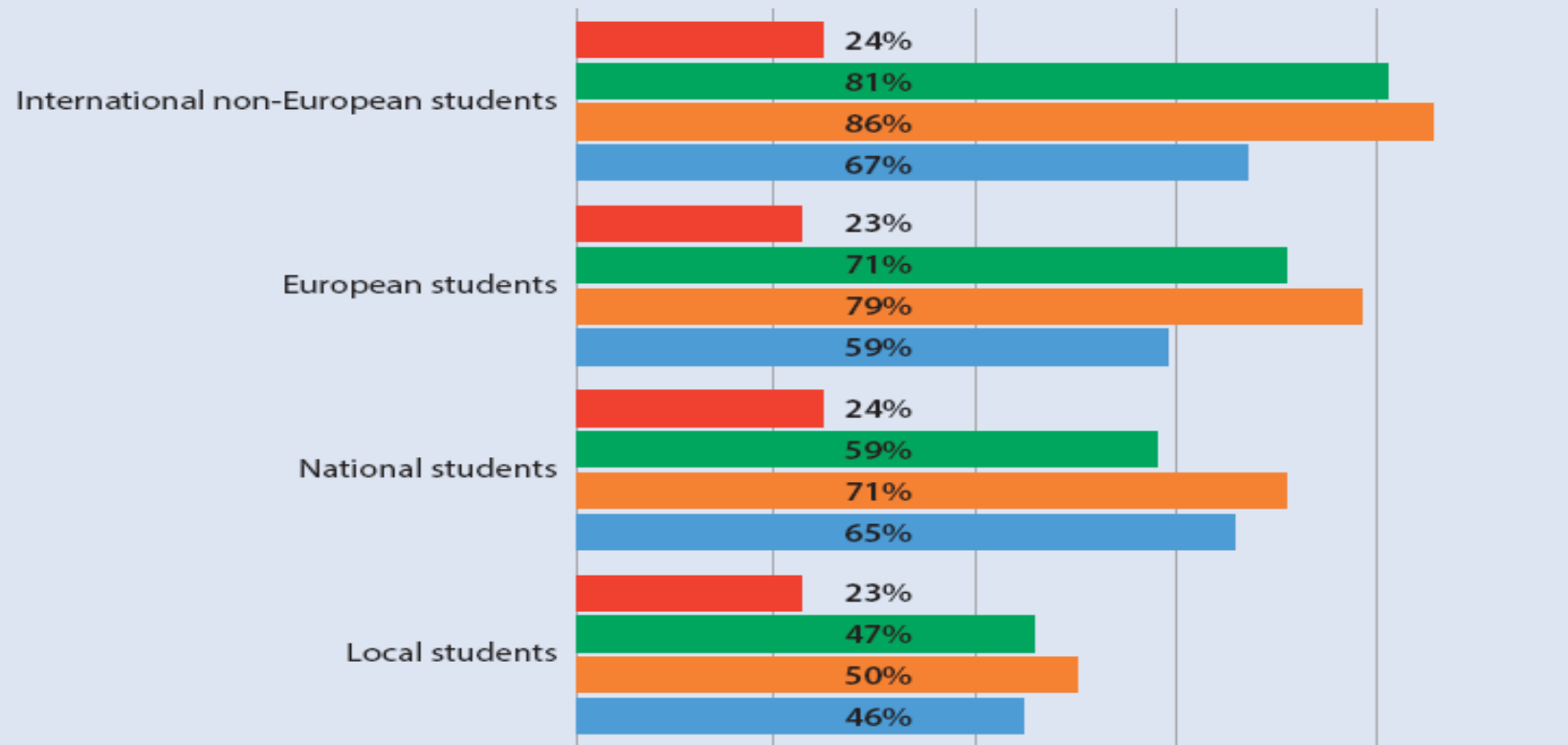
Process for Monitoring Rankings

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

Groups Most Influenced By Rankings

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

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
- 24%
- 81%
- 86%
- 67%

European students
- 23%
- 71%
- 79%
- 59%

National students
- 24%
- 59%
- 71%
- 65%

Local students
- 23%
- 47%
- 50%
- 46%

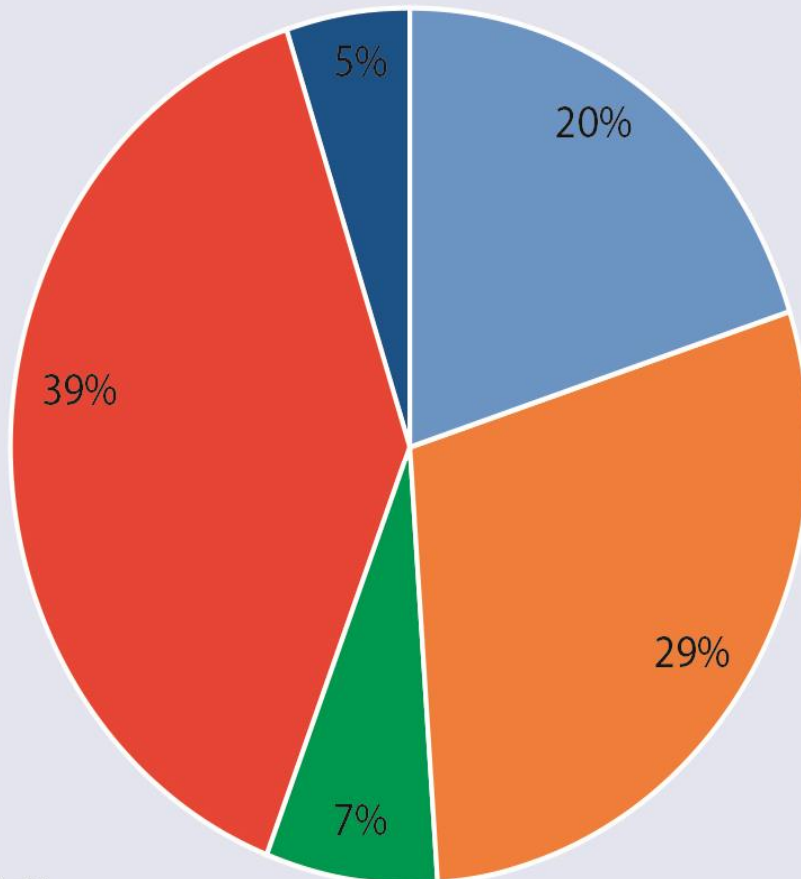🟥 Other (professional studies, lifelong learning provision...)
🟩 Entering doctoral level
🟧 Entering Master level
🟦 Entering Bachelor level

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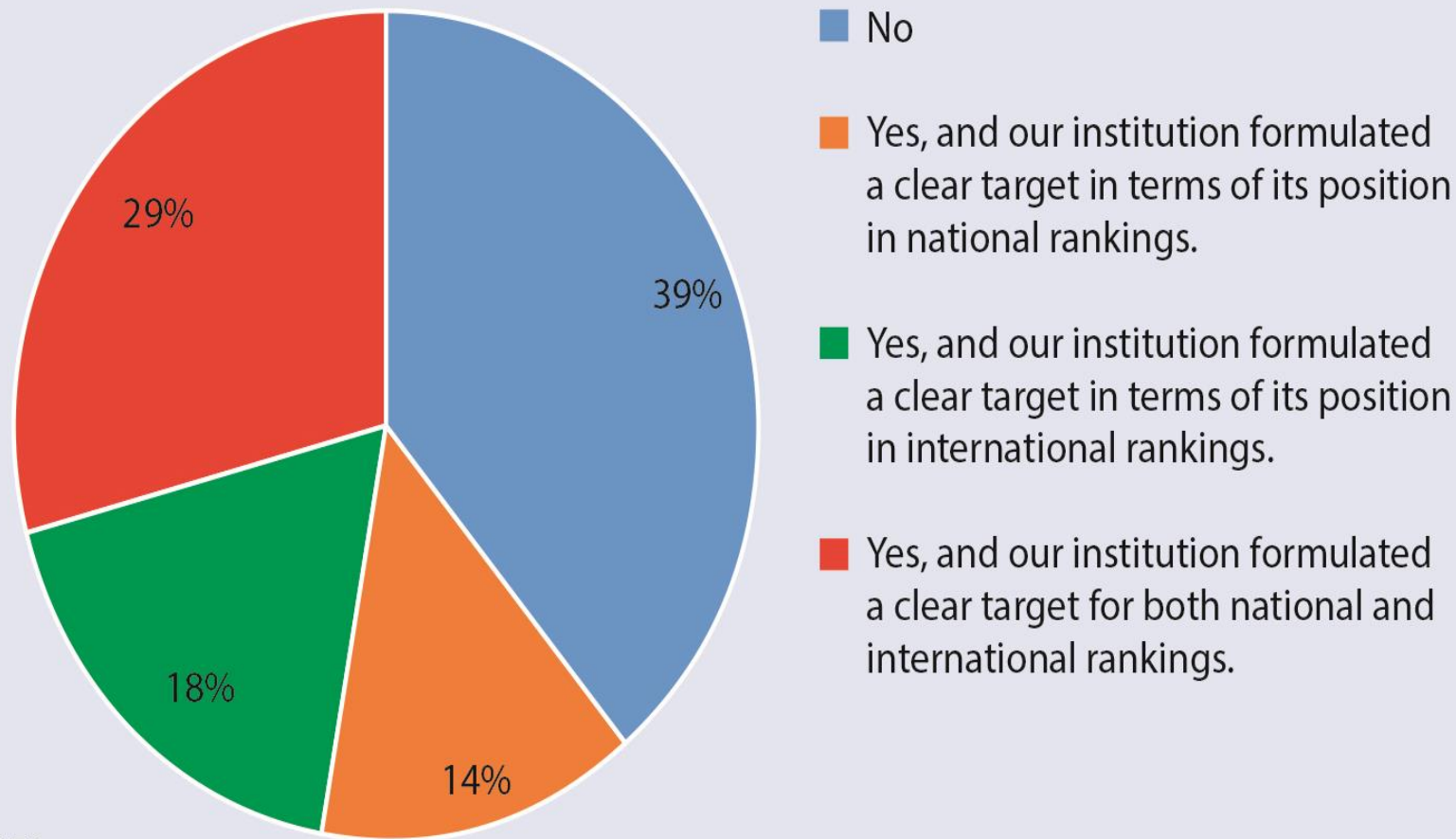
Monitoring Ranking of Other/Peer Institutions

N = 171

Legend:
- No — 20%
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions in our country — 29%
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions abroad — 7%
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions, both in our country and abroad — 39%
- We are planning to do it — 5%

Rankings' Role In Institutional Strategy

- **No** — 39%
- **Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in national rankings.** — 14%
- **Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in international rankings.** — 18%
- **Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target for both national and international rankings.** — 29%

N = 171

Rankings for Strategic, Organisational, Managerial or Academic Action

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- We are planning to do it

Yes: 39%
No: 29%
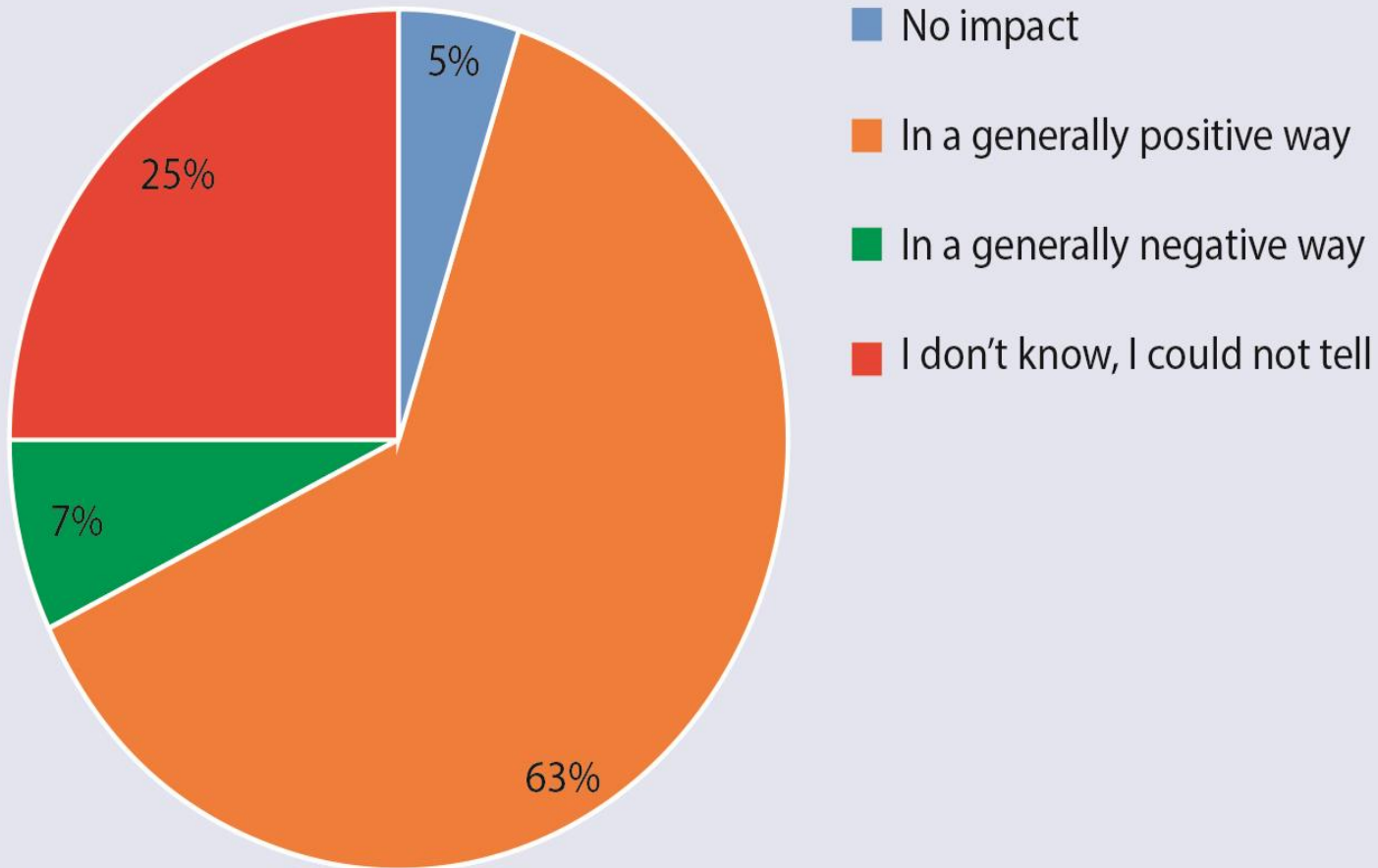We are planning to do it: 32%
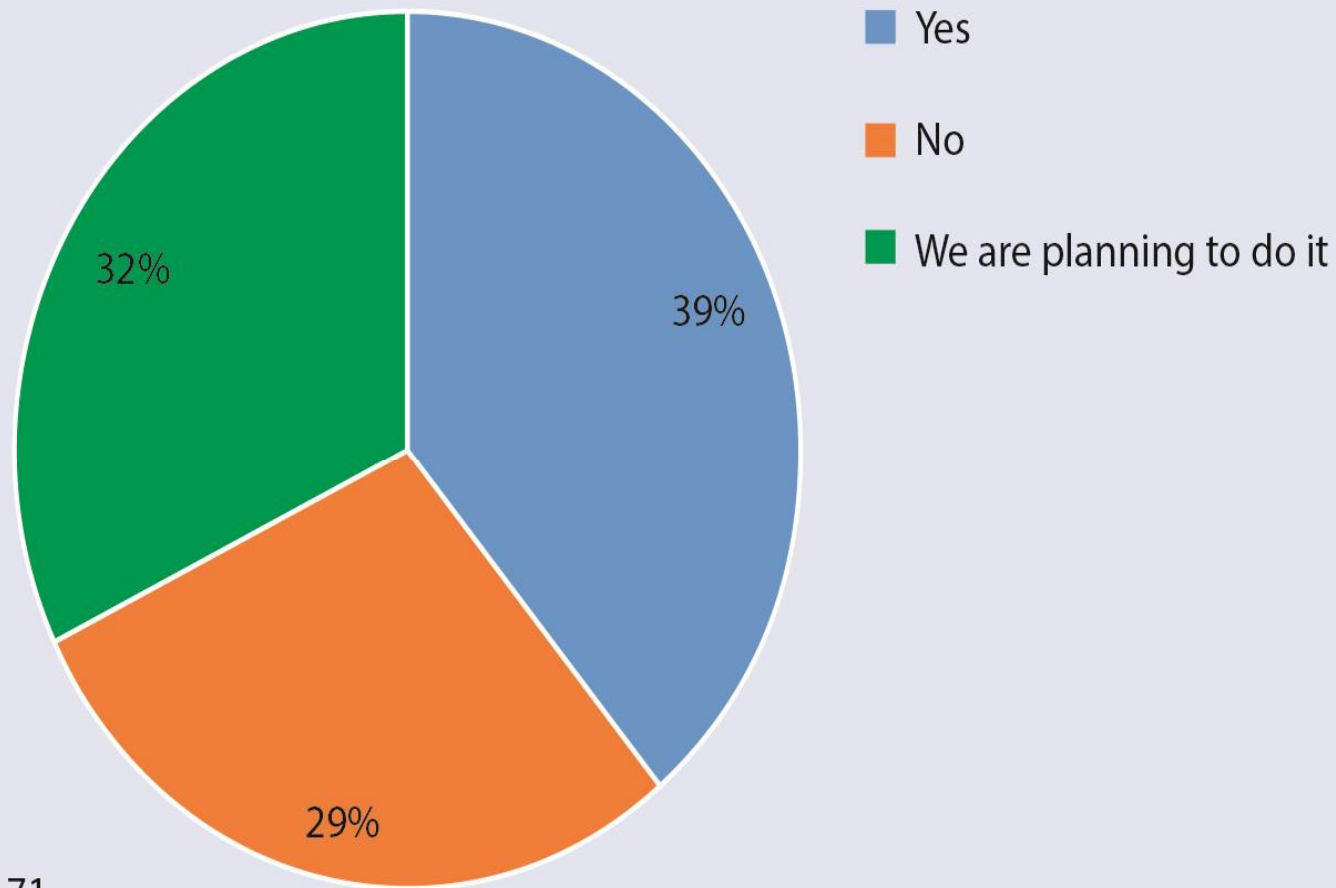
N = 171

Actions Taken Because of Rankings?

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

How Rankings Affect Reputation?

- No impact
- In a generally positive way
- In a generally negative way
- I don't know, I could not tell

5%
25%
7%
63%

N = 171

Rankings For Marketing Or Publicity

Legend:
- Yes, always
- Occasionally
- Only if the position has changed from previous editions
- No

Pie chart values: 30%, 46%, 4%, 20%
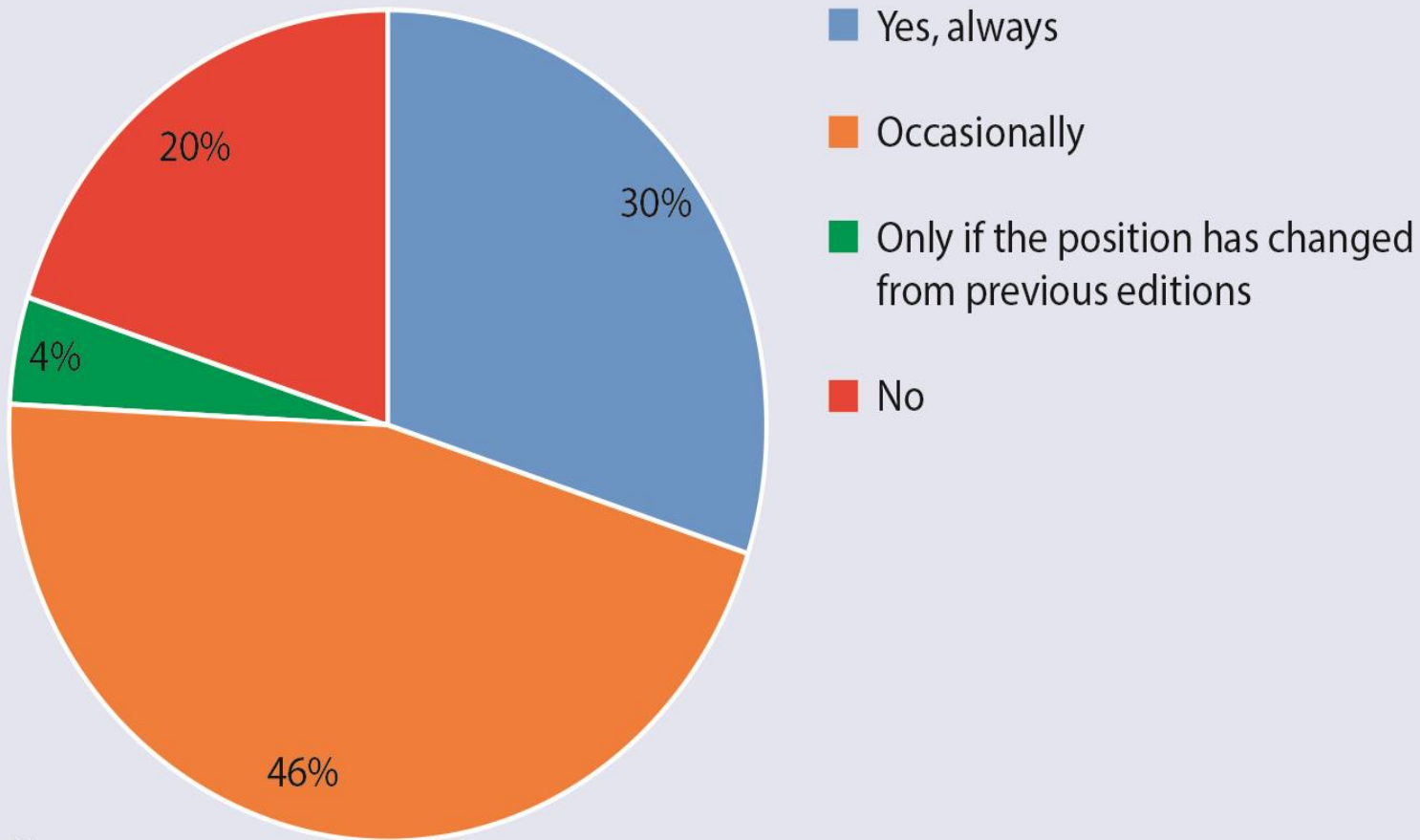
N = 171

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;*

- – Challenging self-perceptions. No more self-declaration.

˝ 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?

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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.

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Conclusion

- ″ Rankings have acted like a "wake-up call"
  - International and national competition
  - Necessity to enchance 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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