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HOW DO RANKINGS IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION?

While university ranking have been part of the US higher education (HE) landscape for decades, the frenzy provoked by publication of the Shanghai Jiaotong Academic Ranking of World Universities and Times QS World University Rankings gives an indication of the seriousness with which many higher education institutions (HEIs), policymakers and the media attach to them. Their increasing credibility derives from their simplicity and provision of 'consumer-type' information independent of the HE sector. Despite 17,000 HEIs worldwide, there is a gladiatorial obsession with the rankings of the top 100. But how much do we know and understand about the influence and impact rankings are having on these various audiences?

Around the world, rankings are published by the media and a wide range of agencies and organizations. As HE has become globalised, the focus has shifted to worldwide rankings. Today, the Shanghai ranking is the 'brand leader'. Each ranking system uses a different set of weighted indicators or metrics to measure higher education activity. Due to the paucity of comparable data for teaching and learning and service/third-mission activities, worldwide rankings are over-reliant on research data and peer review. Other criticism focuses on choice of indicators, weightings and use as quality 'proxies', and bias towards science disciplines and English-language publications.

To understand this phenomenon, IMHE and the IAU sponsored a 2006 study asking how HEIs are responding to rankings, and what impact or influence they are having. Leaders from 202 HEIs in 41 countries participated, representing well-established and new, and teaching intensive, research-informed and research intensive HEIs (Ellen Hazelkorn, *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 19.2 www.oecd.org/edu/imhe/journal).

University leaders believe rankings help maintain and build institutional position and reputation; good students use rankings to 'shortlist' university choice, especially postgraduates; and key stakeholders use rankings to influence their decisions about accreditation, funding, sponsorship and employee recruitment. Respondents say 'reputation derived from league tables is a critical determinant for applicants'. Almost 50% respondents use their institutional rank for publicity purposes, in press releases, official presentations and their website.

58% are unhappy with their position: 70% want to be in the top 10% nationally, and 71% in the top 25% internationally. Over 50% have a formal process to review the results, and 68% use them as a management tool to bring about strategic,

organizational, managerial and/or academic change. This includes embedding rankings in 'target agreements' with faculties, establishing a 'new section to monitor rankings', providing 'more scholarships and staff appointments' and ensuring senior staff are well briefed on the significance of improving performance. Some take a more aggressive stance, using rankings to influence not just organisational change but institutional priorities, while others are considering merger or shifting resources from teaching to research.

Rankings also influence national and international partnerships and collaborations. Leaders say they consider a potential partner's rank prior to entering into discussion about research and academic programmes. In addition, rankings influence the willingness of others to partner with them or support their membership of academic/professional associations.

This international experience is replicated in a US study, and the growing international literature. Rankings are important for domestic high-achievers and the lucrative international postgraduate market. Trends suggest high rankings impact positively on the number of applications, philanthropy, graduate recruitment, governing boards, and public policy. Not surprisingly, HE leaders try to influence critical input indicators, e.g. student selectivity or devote resources to activities which may not directly enhance educational quality.

Rankings are a manifestation of global competition and are used as a policy instrument. Many governments proclaim the desire to establish at least one, if not more, 'world class' universities. But what are the costs? Rankings inflate the academic 'arms race' locking institutions and governments into a continual 'quest for ever increasing resources'. A world-class university is \$1b-\$1.5b-a-year operation, plus an additional \$500m if there is a medical school. This would require many HEIs increasing their overall funding by at least 40% (Usher, 2006; Sadlak and Liu 2007). Few societies or (public) institutions can afford this level of investment, without sacrificing other social and economic objectives. Evidence suggests rankings are propelling a growing gap between elite and mass higher education with greater institutional stratification and research concentration. HEIs which do not meet the criteria or do not have 'brand recognition' will effectively be de-valued.

Despite protest and criticism, some form of national and international comparators is useful, inevitable and here to stay. OECD is responding to this challenge by examining how the full range of activities which diverse HEIs engage in, notably teaching and learning, should be measured (see related article page two). IMHE is also represented at meetings of the

Rankings help maintain and build institutional position and reputation.

The IMHE welcomes the following new members:

- > Charles Darwin University – Australia
- > Handong Global University – Korea
- > Universidad Miguel Hernandez – Spain
- > American Council on Education – USA

HEIS AND REGIONS: THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING NEW

In 2004, IMHE, in collaboration with the OECD Territorial Development and Public Governance Directorate, launched a review of HEIs and their regional engagement. The project “*Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development*” has now come to an end. What was learned from the biggest project in the history of IMHE? And what are the next steps?

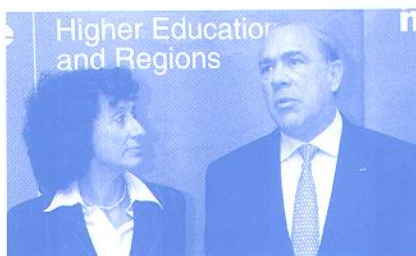
ICT revolution has brought along “a death of distance” where, in principle, any place with internet connection can participate in the knowledge economy. At the same time, globalisation has increased the comparative advantage of regions that create the best conditions for growth. In fact, there are growing gaps between regions as innovation continues to cluster around vibrant communities, skilled people and HEIs. Investing in regional innovation systems improves economic competitiveness. Regional engagement and world class research excellence can be complementary goals for HEIs, the one reinforcing the other.

How to mobilise Higher Education for development?

The final report *Higher Education and Regions – Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged* points important general issues that need to be considered by HEIs, their local and regional stakeholders and the national governments.

Stronger links are necessary HEIs and regions. HEIs should engage in the development and implementation of urban and regional strategies. They should also widen their service portfolio to embrace the whole range of issues ranging from economic to social, cultural and environmental development.

Governments can support this work by increasing HEIs’ responsibility over their



Mercedes Cabrera, Minister, Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, Spain and Angel Gurría, Secretary-General, OECD.

curriculum and the use of human, financial and physical resources. Enhancing institutional autonomy is, however, not enough. Proper incentive structures and accountability schemes need to be put in place to facilitate a step change.

Finally, HEIs themselves must change. They must become professionally managed entrepreneurial organisations and involve students and staff in the regional development activities. Initiatives to promote community service need to be integrated in the teaching and research functions of the HEIs.

Next steps

OECD will continue to work with regions and HEIs. New reviews will focus on rapidly developing economies, G8 countries and city regions. An opportunity for re-evaluation will be offered to the 14 regions. OECD will also work to develop reliable indicators and to provide a forum to enhance partnership-building process between governments, universities and regions.

MORE INFORMATION

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www.oecd.org/edu/higher/regionaldevelopment

The report *Higher Education and Regions – Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged* is available in English, Spanish and French, and soon also in Chinese.

CITY UNIVERSITY OF SEATTLE

Relying on its global and innovative approaches City University of Seattle-CityU has established campuses in several Asian, American and European countries. One of these campuses, Vysoká Škola Manažmentu-VSM in Bratislava and Trencin, the first private institution of higher education in Slovakia, now becomes a partner of CityU. It is fully accredited and recognized in Slovakia. IMHE former colleague Jacqueline Smith recently took part in the evaluation of VSM on behalf of EUA. She reports on a dynamic institution which, faced with many challenges in this country undergoing economic and political transition, succeeded in building its reputation as a provider of qualified professionals: graduates have no difficulty finding employment in Slovakia after graduation. VSM is pioneering flexible forms of education in Slovakia: teaching offered in English and in Slovak, with options to go for accredited BSBA and MBA degrees in either language or both; provision of interactive online courses for working adult students; the possibility to enroll at four different times during the academic year; commitment to quality lifelong learning as well as to initial post secondary education. In addition, research activities in the fields of management or teaching methodologies are expanding; and the institution is engaged in meeting all the requirements of the Bologna process.

CityU joined IMHE a year ago. Since 1973, this private not-for-profit institution of higher education embarked in its mission to offer high quality and relevant lifelong education to anyone with the desire to learn. In the words of its President Lee Gorsuch.

“From delivering both in class and online learning to offering “globally connected” experiences to promoting diversity in the classroom” CityU has always tried to be a model institution.

MORE INFORMATION

www.cityu.edu/index.aspx

www.vsm.sk/index.php?id=31039