

Current initiatives in rankings: how do you see them from the perspective of your agency?

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Overview

- Rankings – an EUA perspective
 - ✓ Reflection on current initiatives
 - ✓ Rankings and their impact on quality culture
- QA vs. Ranking –different concepts
- Conclusion – the way forward

The present landscape

1-Global initiatives

- Global rankings:
 - ✓ Shanghai ARWU
 - ✓ Times-SQ World University Ranking
 - ✓ Leiden Ranking
- Therefore, these rankings are now increasingly reflecting the **prestige** and **reputation** of HEIs
- OECD feasibility study for the international assessment of HE Learning Outcomes: AHELO

The present landscape

2 - European initiatives

- European Commission **feasibility study** to develop multi-dimensional university ranking
- European Commission **statistical database** on Higher Education (via Eurostat)
- European Commission supported European **Classification** of HEIs (CEIHE)
- European Expert group on University-Based **Research Assessment**
- CHE rankings, covering various **classification** initiatives each with a different focus (university rankings, research rankings, departmental excellence rankings, employability rating)

The present landscape - some observations..

- Significant limitations of existing rankings:
 - ✓ **Not comprehensive**: provide an incomplete & once-off snapshot of small segment of a rapidly changing sector
 - ✓ **'One-size-fits-all'** methodology: does not take account of increasingly differentiated HE landscape - across Europe
 - ✓ **Lack of transparency** in the way they are compiled
 - ✓ Compilers use **available data** rather than compiling data
 - ✓ Reflect largely **reputational** factors (40% THES)
 - ✓ Dominance of **research and metrics** – little focus on other missions of the university
- Therefore, existing rankings typically favor old, large, Anglo-Saxon, research intensive institutions with about 24,000 students and a 2 Billion annual budget

Rankings & Quality

- Rankings increasingly equated with quality standards, which is a danger, as:
 1. **externally defined** indicators that are not necessarily linked to an institutions core mission and objectives
 2. some HEIs are tempted to **chase rankings** and focus on improving what can be measured/indicators rather than on their core mission
 3. rankings are based on a **one-size-fits-all** methodology that does not take account of diversity
 4. Poor positioning in the rankings can have a negative impact on **staff morale** (HEFCE 2008)
- ...6...

Ranking

- Relative positions in the participating groups
 - <- mathematically derived
 - <- performance on a number of selected measures
- Independent data or obtained or usually verified by HEI
- Usually no site visit

Quality Assurance

- Judgement of strengths & concerns in a number of measures related to input, process and output of HE
 - > quality enhancement
- Data always obtained from HEI as a self-evaluation report
- Almost always involve site visit by peers

Rankings - the way forward?

- Promote the use of **Berlin Principles** (CEPES, CHE, IHEP, 2006) :
 1. Recognise the diversity of HEIs & take account of different missions & goals
 2. Be transparent regarding methodology
 3. Measure outcomes in preference to inputs
 4. Use audited & verifiable data wherever possible
 5. Provide consumers with a clear understanding of the factors involved & offer a choice in how they are displayed i.e. attach their own weightings

Conclusions

- There is a fundamental difference between Quality Assurance and rankings:
 - ✓ QA process should always be **internally driven** (even if there are external incentives) and aim at enhancing the quality of the activities (usually through recommendations) and therefore foster a quality culture.
 - ✓ rankings are **externally driven** and only state the current situation of an institution in comparison to other institutions on the basis of selected indicators.

Conclusions

- QA and evaluations usually take into account the variety of missions (diversity of HE) and **processes behind the indicators**
- Rankings measure the performance of an institution against a certain (ideal) model of an institution reflected in the choice of **selective indicators** by the compilers
- Whilst the compiler may use objective indicators, combining these indicators is always subject to judgement and hence subjective

