



Loughborough
University

Can rankings support universities' quest for excellence?

Dr Elizabeth Gadd @LizzieGadd

EUA Annual Conference
20 April 2023





Times Higher Education

Rankings



Rankings



WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS



Round University Ranking is a ranking



SHANGHAI RANKING



#InspiringWinners since 1909

Aren't they just harmless curiosities?

- Governments invest in ranking-climbing programmes
- Governments merge institutions to 'win' at ranking
- Governments use them for decision-making
- Students use them to decide where to study
- Faculty use them to decide where to work
- Where there's a prize, there's a game...

Government-run university excellence initiatives

- Taiwan “*Development plan for world class universities and research centers of excellence*”
- Russia “*Academic Excellence Initiative*” Project 5-100
- China “*Double First Class Initiative*” 42 world-class HEIs by 2050
- Japan “*Top Global University Project*”

University mergers

nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03004-x

nature

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nature > news > article

NEWS | 27 October 2020 | Correction 31 November 2020

How France overcame the odds to build a research mega-campus

The huge Paris-Saclay University has earned a top international ranking – but researchers say it's too soon to judge whether the model is a success.

Barbara Casanovi

A photograph showing a laboratory setting with people and equipment.

campusmorningmail.com.au/news/writings/sai-wags-the-strategy-dog/

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March 13, 2023 | Feature Story

Rankings tail wags the strategy dog

If the ARC's research metrics are abolished they will be replaced by commercially-motivated providers of league tables and research metrics – when other nations are working on new ways of assessment

by CAMERON NEYLON and JAMES WILSDON

WA vice-chancellors were knocked for six last week when the state government sprung a *structural review* on the sector. Its ostensible goal is to test the ground for a merger of four West Australian universities (Curtin, Edith Cowan, Murdoch and UWA) on the basis that a combined behemoth would somehow "rocket up global rankings".

Campus Morning Mail is an independent newsletter written and published by Stephen Matchett, formerly a professional journalist.

UK government high potential individual visa

www.gov.uk/high-potential-individual-visa/eligibility



[Home](#) > [Visas and immigration](#) > [Work in the UK](#)

High Potential Individual (HPI) visa

Eligibility

To be eligible for a High Potential Individual (HPI) visa, you must have been awarded a qualification by an eligible university.

Where you studied

The list of eligible universities is based on rankings of universities from around the world.



Submit an article

Journal homepage

2,128

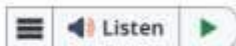
Views:

0

CrossRef
citations to date


25

Altmetric



Articles

Do rankings affect universities' financial sustainability? – financial vulnerability to rankings and elite status as a positional good


Roxana-Diana Baltaru  Radu-Dragomir Manac & Miruna-Daniela Ivan

Pages 2323-2335 | Published online: 28 Apr 2022

organisational data on 102 English universities from 2008 to 2017, we find that the rank a university occupies in league tables affects all universities except elite universities, controlling for previous level of financial sustainability and institutional level differences. We further show that this relationship is partly explained by universities' income from tuition fees. The findings document universities' financial vulnerability to rankings in quasi-markets

Investment in ranking improvement

Rankings Assistant

 [Send](#) [Save](#) [Apply](#)

Durham University Business School

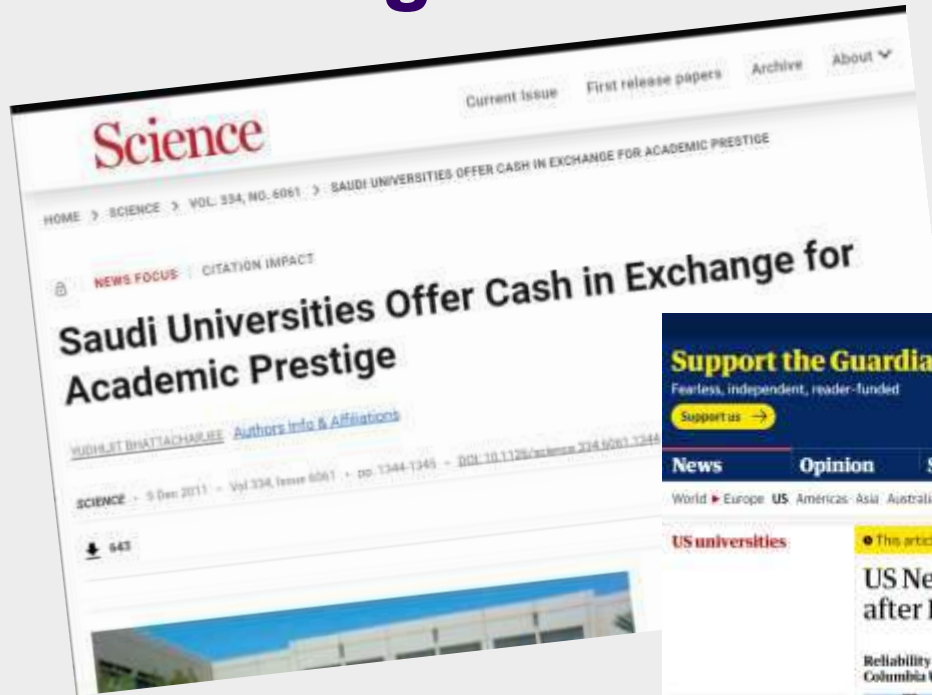
Dynamic and vibrant, Durham University Business School is one of Durham University's four Faculties and is comprised of three research-intensive departments: Accounting, Economics and Finance, and Management and Marketing. Known for its global reputation, its impact on policy and practice and its strong focus on ethics, responsibility and sustainability, the School aims to be a leading European business school with a strong global presence by 2027.

The School currently has 180 academic and teaching staff, with plans and resource commitments to grow to 230 by 2027. The School has a high-quality portfolio of programmes at undergraduate, masters and doctoral level, across all subject areas. The school's student population is around 4000, across undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes, attracting a talented and diverse student intake (with over 130 nationalities).

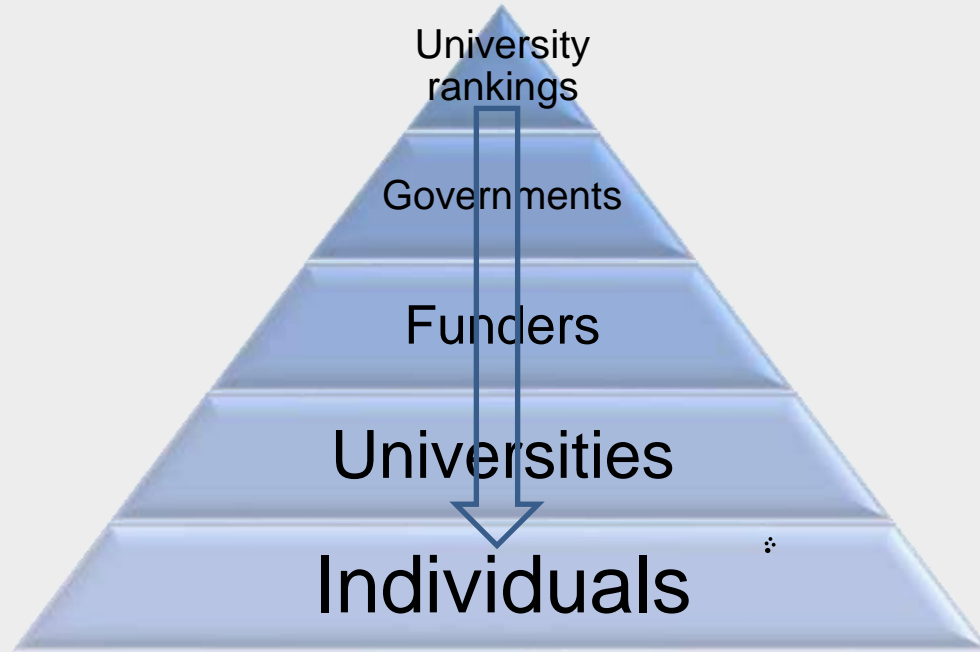
Our vision is to lead business thought and practice to improve global wealth and well-being. Our associated mission is to create, share and use knowledge to deliver equitable and sustainable futures around

Recruiter	DURHAM UNIVERSITY
Location	Durham (County) (GB)
Salary	£18852 - £20092 per annum
Posted	15 Jul 2022
End of advertisement period	05 Aug 2022
Ref	22001052
Academic Discipline	Business & Economics Business & Management
Job Type	Professional Services Administrative
Contract Type	Fixed Term

Gaming...and cheating



Trickle-down effect



CoARA Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

Core commitments

1. Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research
2. Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators
3. Abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index
4. Avoid the use of rankings of research organisations in research assessment



But shouldn't universities be accountable?

- Yes!
- But accountable to whom?
- Who appointed the rankings?
- To whom are they accountable?
- Shouldn't universities be holding the rankings to account?



Stephen Curry
@Stephen_Curry



If you need a league table to tell you what matters, are you really a university?

18:54 · 21/03/2023 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

ARE THEY TRUE?

The research question

- Which is the best university in the world?
- Best at what?
- What are the characteristics of a top university
- ...and in what proportion?

Methods

- Indicator validity
- Data quality
- Sensitivity
- Error bars

Indicator validity

3. Indicators and Weights for ARWU

Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
Quality of Education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Alumni	10%
Quality of Faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Award	20%
Quality of Faculty	Highly Cited Researchers	HiCi	20%
Research Output	Papers published in Nature and Science*	N&S	20%
Research Output	Papers indexed in Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index	PUB	20%
Per Capita Performance	Per capita academic performance of an institution	PCP	10%
Total			100%

Data quality

Ranking surveys are “unscientific straw polls”

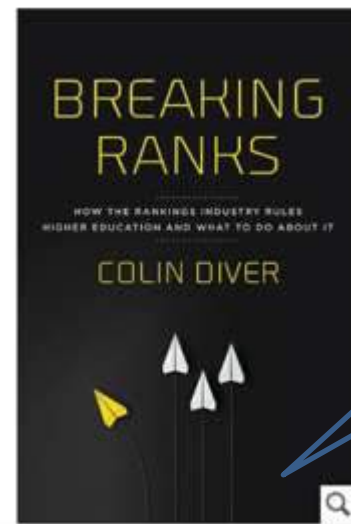
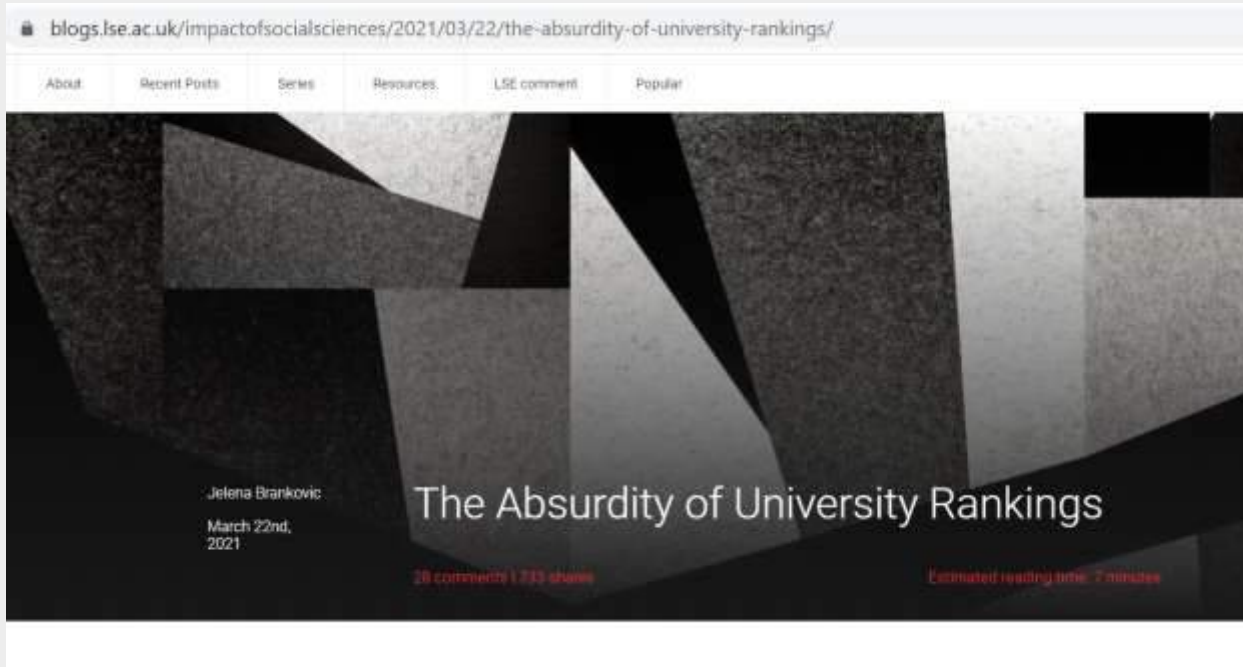


Table 1: Michael Thaddeus's attempt to replicate the *US News* college ranking of his own institution, Columbia University.

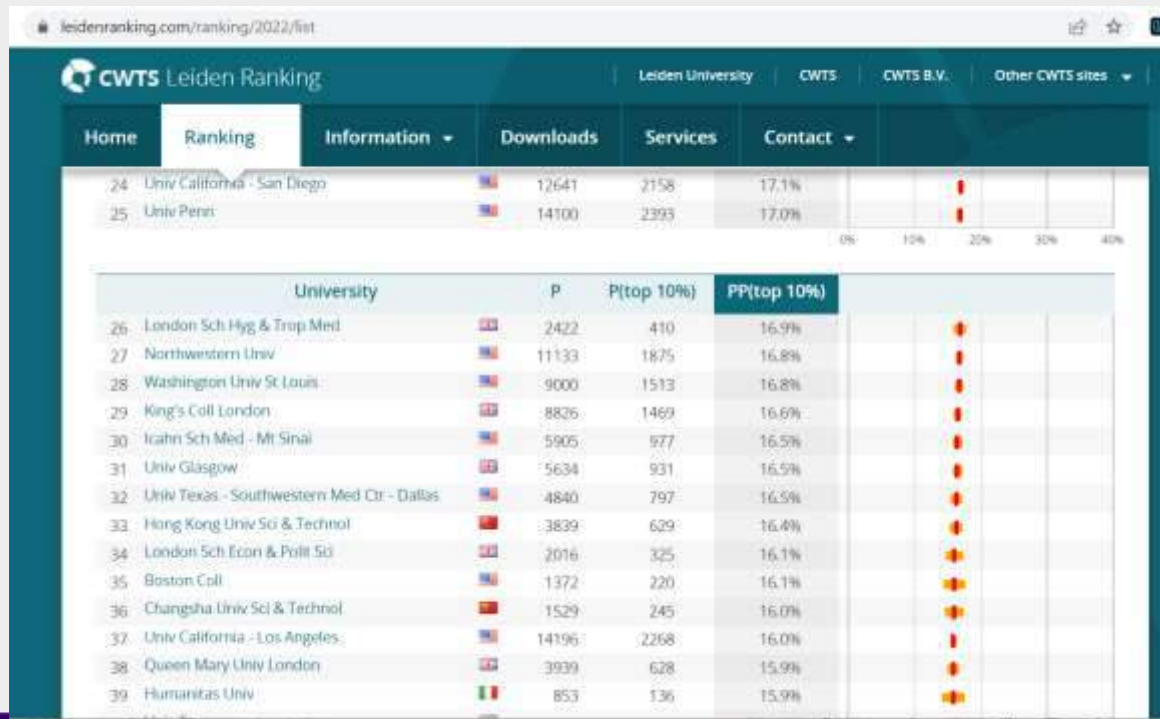
League table metric	Columbia	Prof Thaddeus's estimate
Undergraduate classes with under 20 students	82.5%	62.7% to 66.9%
Full-time faculty with PhD or terminal degree	100%	96%
Percent faculty that is full-time	96.5%	74.1%
Student-faculty ratio	6 to 1	11 to 1
Financial resources per student	\$3.1 billion	\$289 million
Six-year graduation percentage	96%	92%

Sensitivity



“Bielefeld’s 120-place rise in the ranking was, our analysis showed, clearly caused by one scholar.”

Honest reporting: CWTS Leiden Ranking stability intervals



Reporting

Adrian Barnett, Elizabeth Gadd, University League
Tables have no Legs to Stand on, *Significance*,
Volume 19, Issue 4, August 2022, Pages 4-
7, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1740-9713.01663>

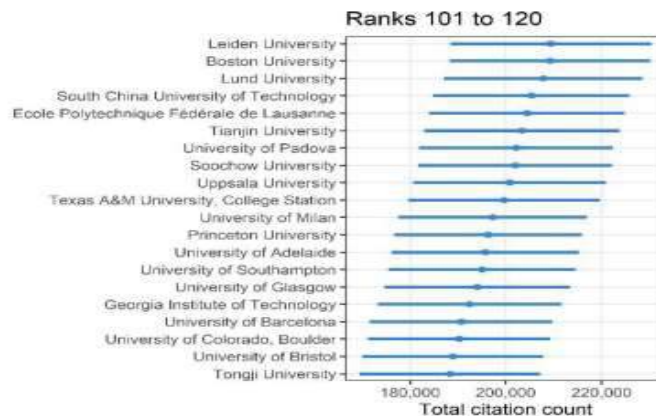
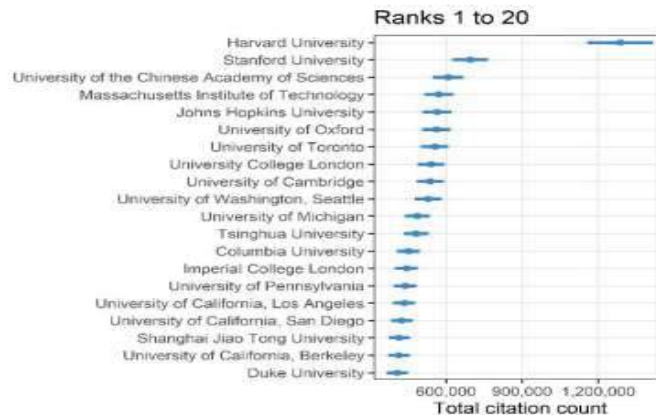


Figure 2: Total citation counts from 1,225 universities plus-and-minus an assumed 10% error.

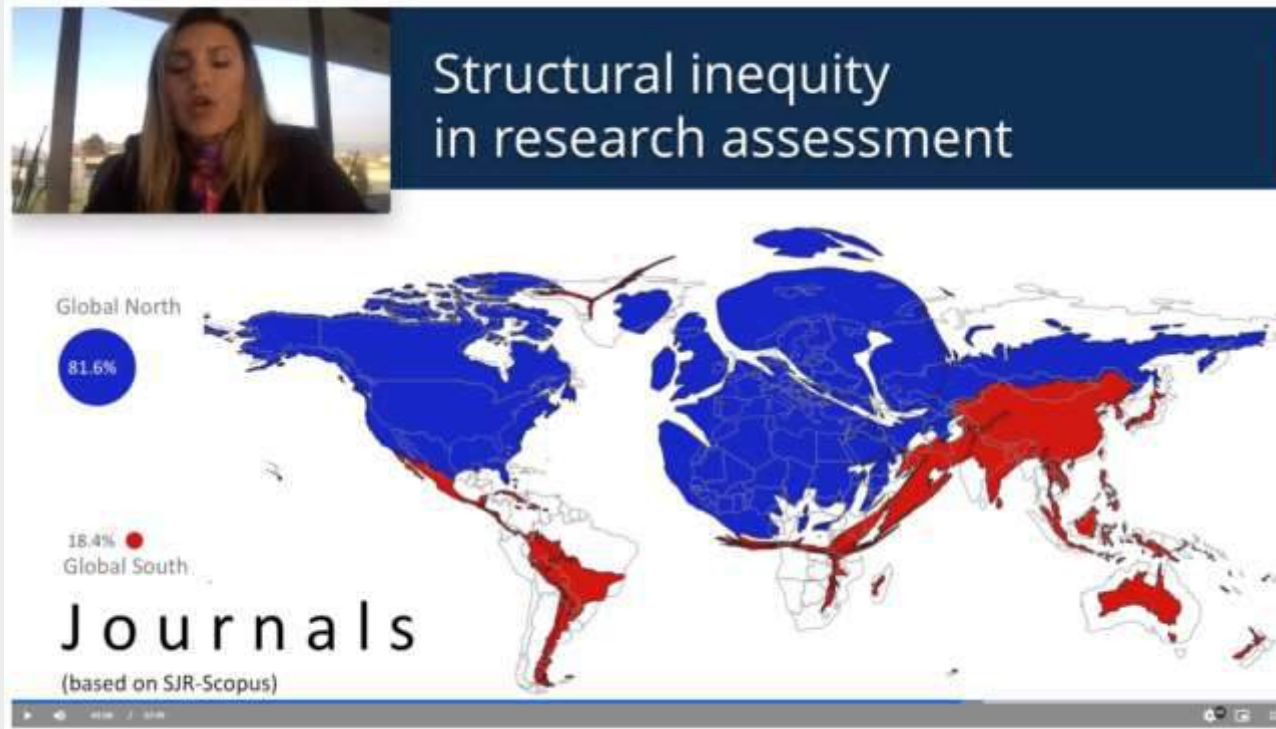
ARE THEY FAIR?

Characteristics of a highly-ranked HEI

- Old
- Large
- Wealthy
- Research-intensive
- Science-focussed
- English-speaking
- ‘Global North’



Location of journals used in THE & QS Rankings



Arianna Becerril-García, Responsible Research
Assessment Conference, GRC, November
2020

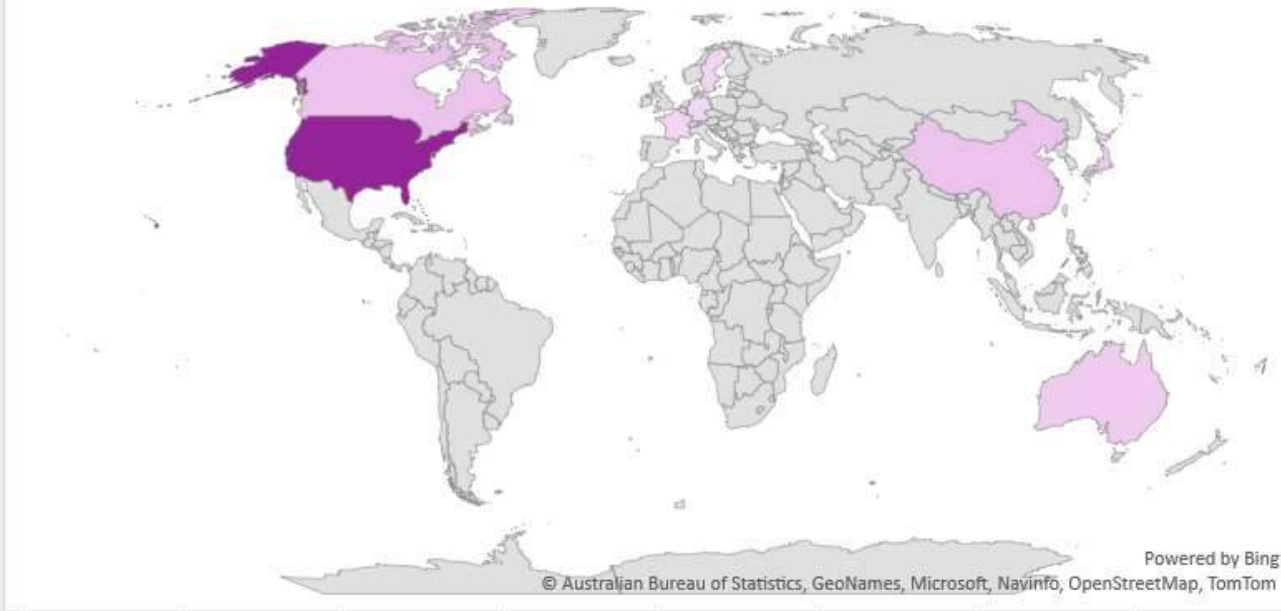
Location of top 20 HEIs in *THE* World Ranking



Location of top 20 HEIs in *THE* Impact Ranking



Countries in which high potential individuals can be found according the UK government



<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/high-potential-individual-visa-global-universities-list/high-potential-individual-visa-global-universities-list-2022>

United Nations University
International Institute for Global Health

World-class Universities? Interrogating the Biases and Coloniality of Global University Rankings

UNU-IIGH Briefing Paper, February 2023



Yale, Harvard and UC Berkeley law schools withdraw from US News rankings

Both law schools say US News & World Report's annual rankings are in conflict with commitments to diversity and affordability



Students at Harvard law school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Yale and Harvard appear to be the first to opt out of the US News rankings. Photograph: Steven Senne/AP

In the most dramatic rebuke of the US News & World Report's colleges and universities rankings to date, Yale and Harvard announced on Wednesday they will stop participating in the magazine's law school rankings, citing frustrations with the list's methodology.

Harvard Leads an Exodus of Medical Schools Withdrawing from US News Rankings

The nation's top-ranked medical schools have stated they will no longer participate in annual rankings with U.S. News, citing methodological and philosophical frustrations.

By Alexandra Tommaso Purgella - 01/24/23 4:37pm



Harvard Medical School was the first to withdraw from med school rankings. Photo by David L. Ryan/The Boston Globe

Conflicts of interest

Berkeley Center for Studies in
Higher Education

Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.5.2021

DOES CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISTORT GLOBAL UNIVERSITY RANKINGS?

April 2021*

Igor Chirikov
University of California Berkeley

“Universities with frequent QS-related contracts had an increase of 0.75 standard deviations (~140 positions) in QS World University Rankings ... over five years, regardless of changes in the institutional quality.”



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The World 100 is focused on improving and maintaining the reputation, communications, strategy, crisis, marketing, and international partnerships of the world's best universities via our Reputation Network, consultancy, research, events and more.



Of members improved or maintained their THE 2021 rank



Members made the top 50 places of AWRU 2021



Of members improved their academic reputation scores in the 2021 QS Rankings

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United Kingdom



Jelena Brankovic @jelena3121... ...

@jelena3121

Imagine a game of football in which a referee is also the coach of one of the teams playing. Crazy, right? You know what's crazier? The audience believing that a fair game is possible.



Brankovic, 2022

ARE THEY HELPFUL?

Do they help students?

- Rankings offer no/poor assessments of teaching quality

3. Indicators and Weights for ARWU

Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
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Per Capita Performance	Per capita academic performance of an institution	PCP	10%
Total			100%

The streetlight effect



Do they help students?

- Students aren't looking for a good place to study...
- Students are looking for a good place to put on their CV

“Post-secondary education has become a competition for prestige. And rankings...have become the primary signifiers of prestige.”

Professor Colin Diver, “Breaking Ranks”

False signifiers of prestige

- Rankings for universities
- Journal Impact Factors for journals
- H-indices for faculty

- It's not the indicators but the prestige economy that's the problem

Do they help the sector to do better?

- Better or best?
- Diversity or homogeneity?
- Inspiring winners or making losers out of everyone?
- Encouraging collaboration or competition?

Perhaps the better question is, who stands most to benefit from university rankings?

- The rankers
- The highly ranked



How do we tackle the prestige economy?

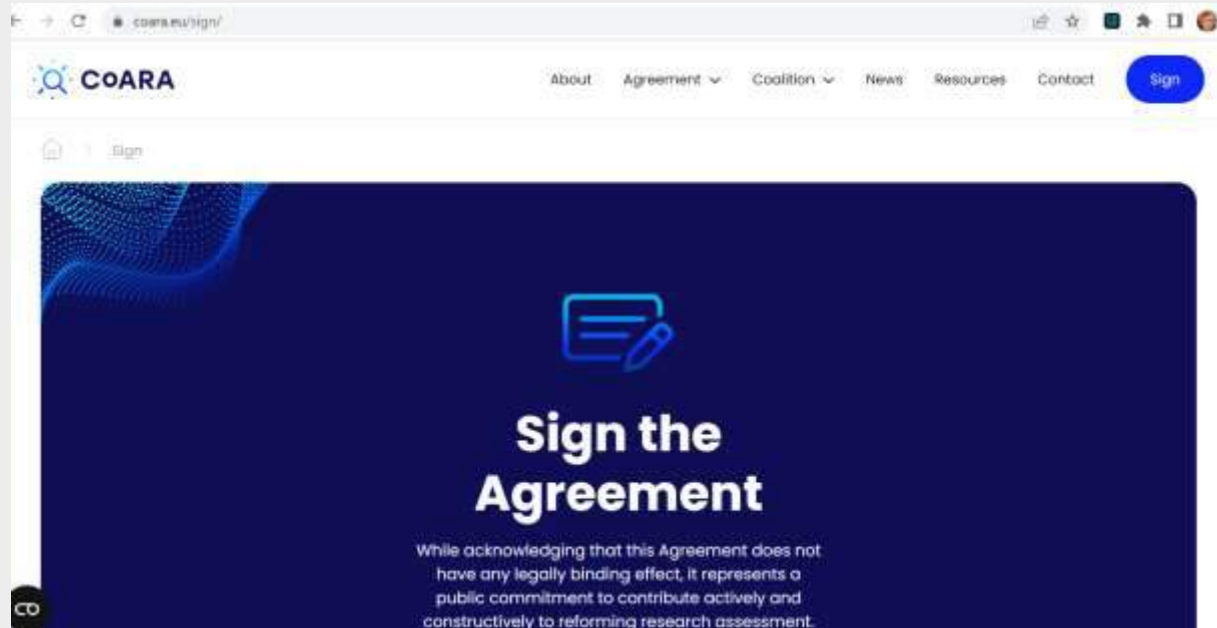
- Redefine prestige
 - New definitions need to displace legacy definitions
- Educate that ‘excellence’ cannot be counted
 - Seek better ways of recognising quality

What can institutions do?

- **Accepting** the rankings is an unacceptable position for the thinking university.
- **Rejecting** the rankings amounts to financial and reputational suicide
- “If you’re not part of the **solution**, you’re part of the problem”

1. Sign the Agreement on Advancing Research Assessment

..and join the Coalition on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA)



2. Sign up to More Than Our Rank



The screenshot shows the inorms website header with navigation links: HOME, ABOUT, INORMS CONGRESS, ACTIVITIES, MEMBERSHIP, CONTACT. Below the header is a section titled "More Than Our Rank" with a grid of orange dots. The text describes the initiative's purpose and includes a "Why participate?" section.

More Than Our Rank

The More Than Our Rank initiative has been developed in response to some of the problematic features and effects of the global university rankings. It provides an opportunity for academic institutions to highlight the many and various ways they serve the world that are not reflected in their ranking position. This initiative is meant for every academic institution, whether ranked or unranked, top 10 or yet to place. It is an initiative for institutions who are proud of their ranking position but also recognize the limitations of the indicators used, and for those who feel that the rankings do not reflect their strengths or institutional mission. Every institution in the world is much more than their rank. This initiative is simply an opportunity to publicly say so and explain why.

Why participate?

By participating in the More Than Our Rank initiative, academic institutions are demonstrating a commitment to responsible assessment and to acknowledging a broader and more diverse definition of institutional success.

more than our rank
an inorms initiative



“The European University Association (EUA) is pleased to provide its support to the INORMS “More Than Our Rank” initiative...EUA believes that the initiative will have an important role in drawing attention to the broad diversity of practices and activities that should be part of a responsible assessment system.”

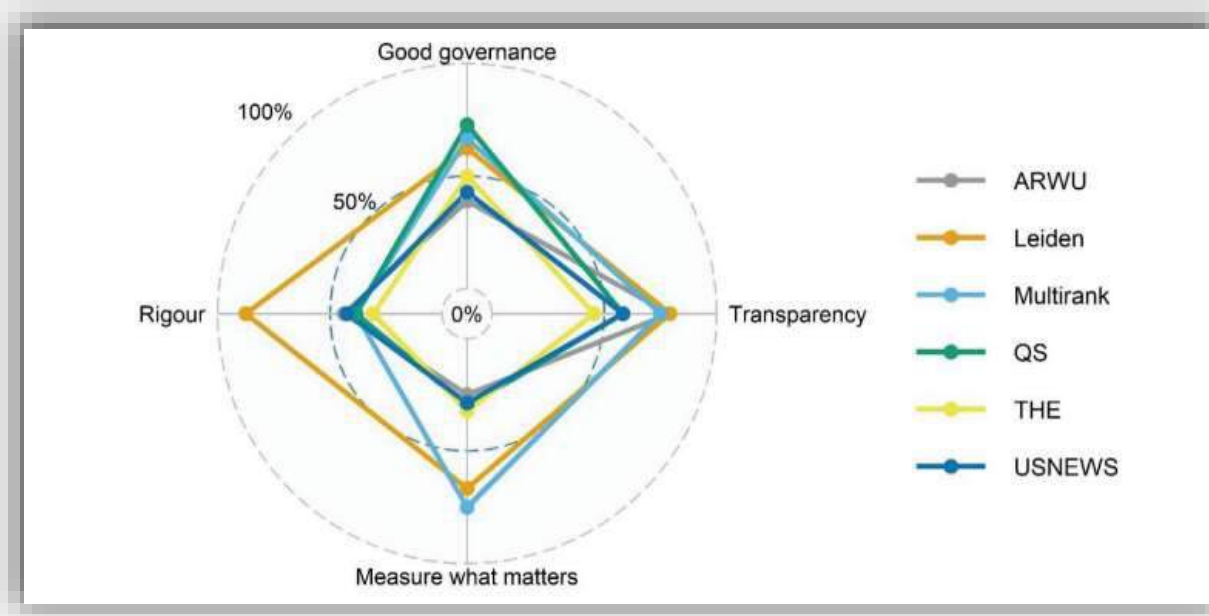
<https://inorms.net/more-than-our-rank/>

3. Support initiatives to provide better forms of university assessment

“Profiles not rankings”



4. Hold the university rankings to account



INORMS
Research
Evaluation Group
Ranker Ratings,
(2020)
<https://inorms.net/rethinking-global-university-rankings-3/>

Thanks for listening

- Dr Elizabeth Gadd
- *Chair* INORMS Research Evaluation Group
- *Vice-Chair* Coalition on Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)
- Email: E.a.gadd@lboro.ac.uk
- Twitter: @INORMS_REWG @LizzieGadd @CoARAssessment
- <https://inorms.net/activities/research-evaluation-group/>