Reflections on how to deal with rankings and on their impact

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- Where I come from
- We should not overestimate the role of rankings...
- …but they do some have some use
EUA has 840 members based in 48 countries (as of 1 Jan 2020)
Main activities

**Stakeholder dialogue**
European institutions, European associations, national organisations, global partners, media, etc.
Makes the voice of European Universities heard

**Policy development**
Consultations, recommendations, reports, policy positions
Influences European policies for the benefit of the university sector

**Membership activities**
Events, projects, focus groups, thematic peer groups
Allows members to share good practice and EUA to gather evidence
What we can agree upon

• Ranking methodologies have flaws
• Rankings don’t tell the whole story
• Increased attention in public discourse paid to universities is positive
Drivers or opportunists?

The impact of rankings?

- Overreactions in early stages, sobering since
- Focus on challenges in
  - Public information provision
  - Institutional data management
- Diminishing impact of one or another ranking
  - Choose the one that fits your needs?
- Actual impact difficult to discern
Putting rankings in a context

- History, culture
- Legislation
- Disciplines, profile
- Steering mechanisms (funding, QA, etc)
- Strategy
What can they be used for?

- Inform decision-making
- Fill information gap
- Benchmarking
- Marketing purposes

https://www.eua.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=415
Ten principles for the responsible use of university rankings

by Ludo Waltman, Paul Wouters, Nees Jan van Eck

Interpretation of university rankings

5. Comparisons between universities should be made keeping in mind the differences between universities

6. Uncertainty in university rankings should be acknowledged

7. An exclusive focus on the ranks of universities in a university ranking should be avoided; the values of the underlying indicators should be taken into account

Use of university rankings

8. Dimensions of university performance not covered by university rankings should not be overlooked

9. Performance criteria relevant at the university level should not automatically be assumed to have the same relevance at the department of research group level

10. University rankings should be handled cautiously, but they should not be dismissed as being completely useless

https://www.cwts.nl/blog?article=n-r2q274
To conclude

- International dataset for higher education and research still not any closer
- Importance of understanding the limitations of rankings and the logic and underpinning valued and drivers behind them

*It is vital that each university has a coherent mission and strategic plan, and stays true to that mission.*
Thank you for your attention