



Loughborough  
University

Can rankings support universities'  
quest for excellence?

Dr Elizabeth Gadd @LizzieGadd

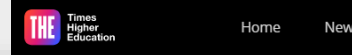
German Rectors Conference,  
Nuremberg  
28 November 2023





Times Higher Education

Rankings



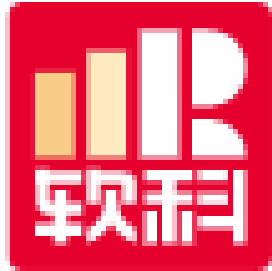
Rankings



WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS



Round University Ranking is a ranking



SHANGHAI RANKING



#InspiringWinners since 1909

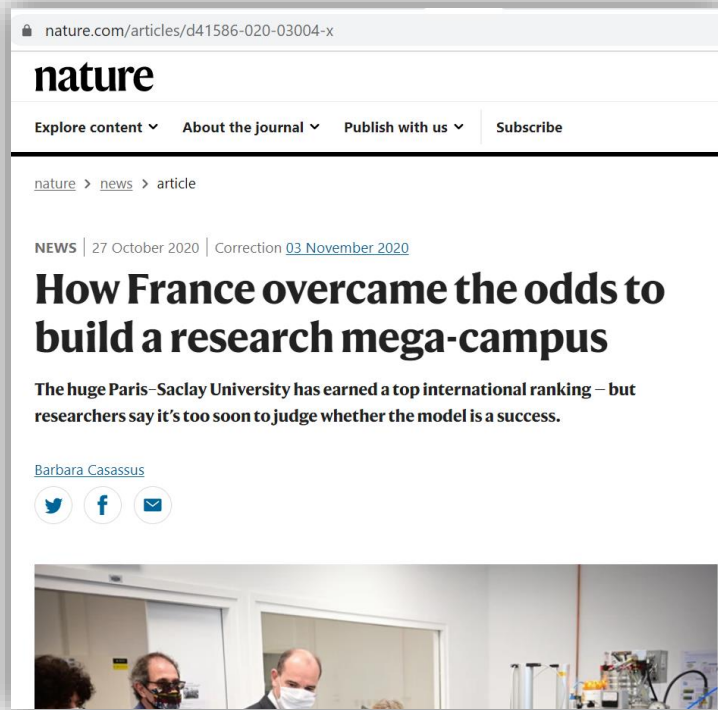
# Aren't they just harmless curiosities?

- 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



## The Network

The unique forum convening public and private sector leaders for networking, intelligence and debates on research and innovation.

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## Network Updates

*These updates are republished press releases and communications from members of the Science | Business Network*

KU Leuven researchers develop safe alternative to controversial building-block chemical

31 Aug 2023 | KU Leuven

Trinity wins prestigious Athena Swan Silver Awards

## Romania kicks off debate on university mergers after falling out of Shanghai ranking

22 Aug 2023 | News

*Some university heads are saying the country should follow the French model of consolidation after the only university to have featured in the research-focused ranking drops out*

By Florin Zubaşcu



# 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.



Studies in Higher Education >

Volume 47, 2022 - Issue 11

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2,128

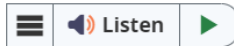
Views

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

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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	<a href="#">Business &amp; Economics</a> , <a href="#">Business &amp; Management</a>
Job Type	<a href="#">Professional Services</a> , <a href="#">Administrative</a>
Contract Type	<a href="#">Fixed Term</a>

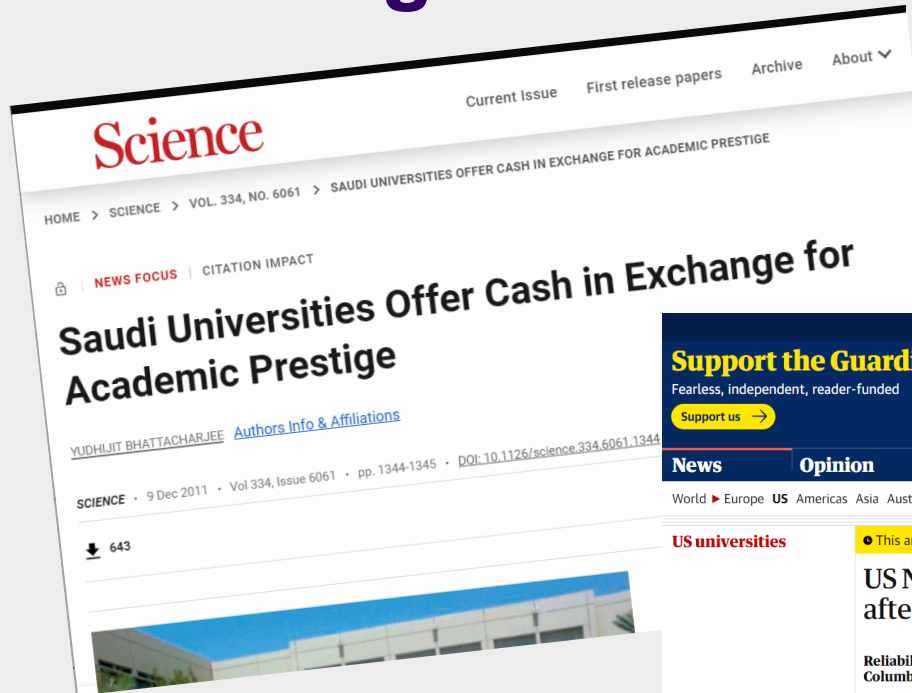
### Durham University Business School

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

# Gaming...and cheating



Science

HOME > SCIENCE > VOL. 334, NO. 6061 > SAUDI UNIVERSITIES OFFER CASH IN EXCHANGE FOR ACADEMIC PRESTIGE


NEWS FOCUS | CITATION IMPACT

## Saudi Universities Offer Cash in Exchange for Academic Prestige

YUJHIJIT BHATTACHARJEE [Authors Info & Affiliations](#)

SCIENCE • 9 Dec 2011 • Vol 334, Issue 6061 • pp. 1344-1345 • DOI: 10.1126/science.334.6061.1344

643



THE RACE TO MAKE A SUSTAINABLE WORLD

# University World News

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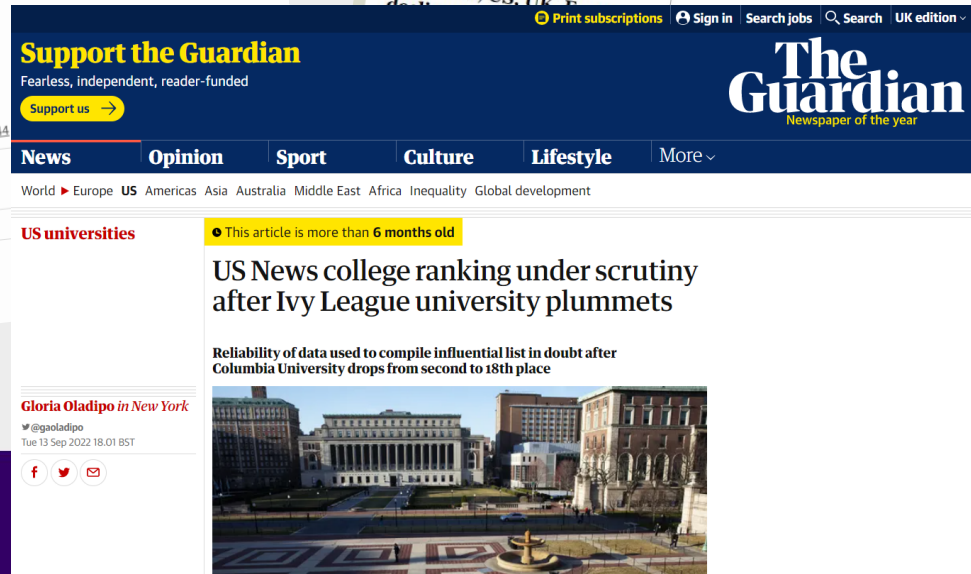
## New rankings results show how some are gaming the system

Angel Calderon 12 June 2020

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## US universities

This article is more than 6 months old

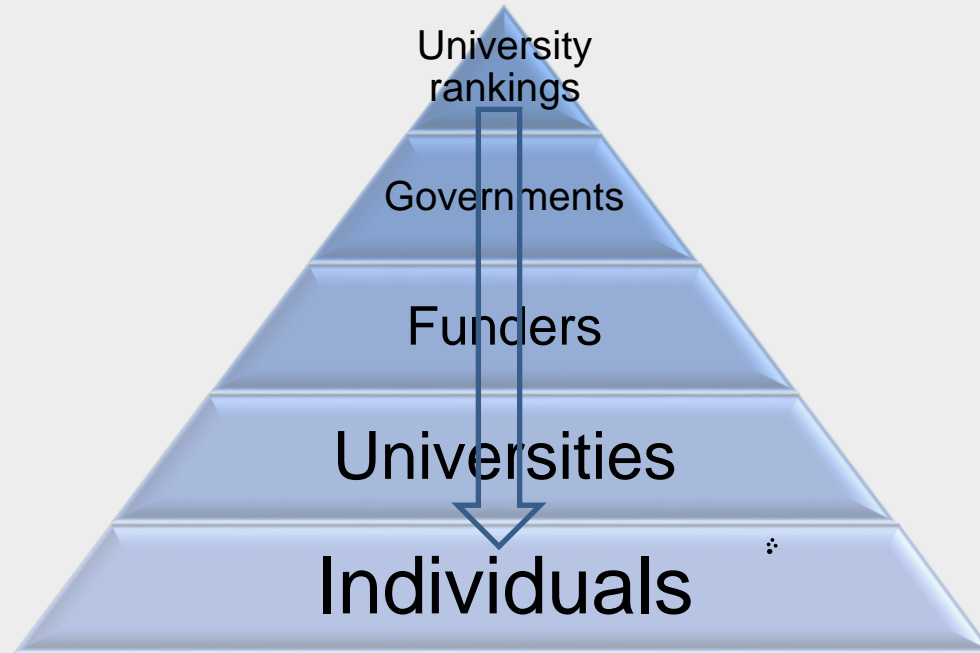
### US News college ranking under scrutiny after Ivy League university plummets

Reliability of data used to compile influential list in doubt after Columbia University drops from second to 18th place

Gloria Oladipo in New York  
@gaoladipo  
Tue 13 Sep 2022 18.01 BST



# 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

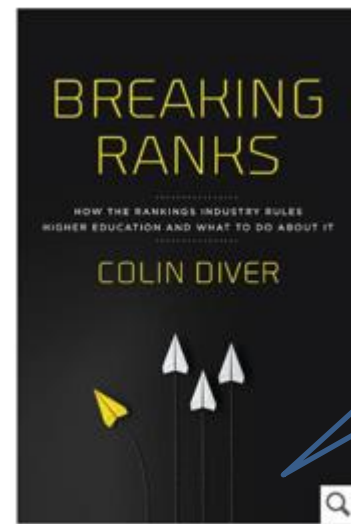
## 3. Indicators and Weights for ARWU

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”



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**US universities** This article is more than 6 months old

**US News college ranking under scrutiny after Ivy League university plummets**

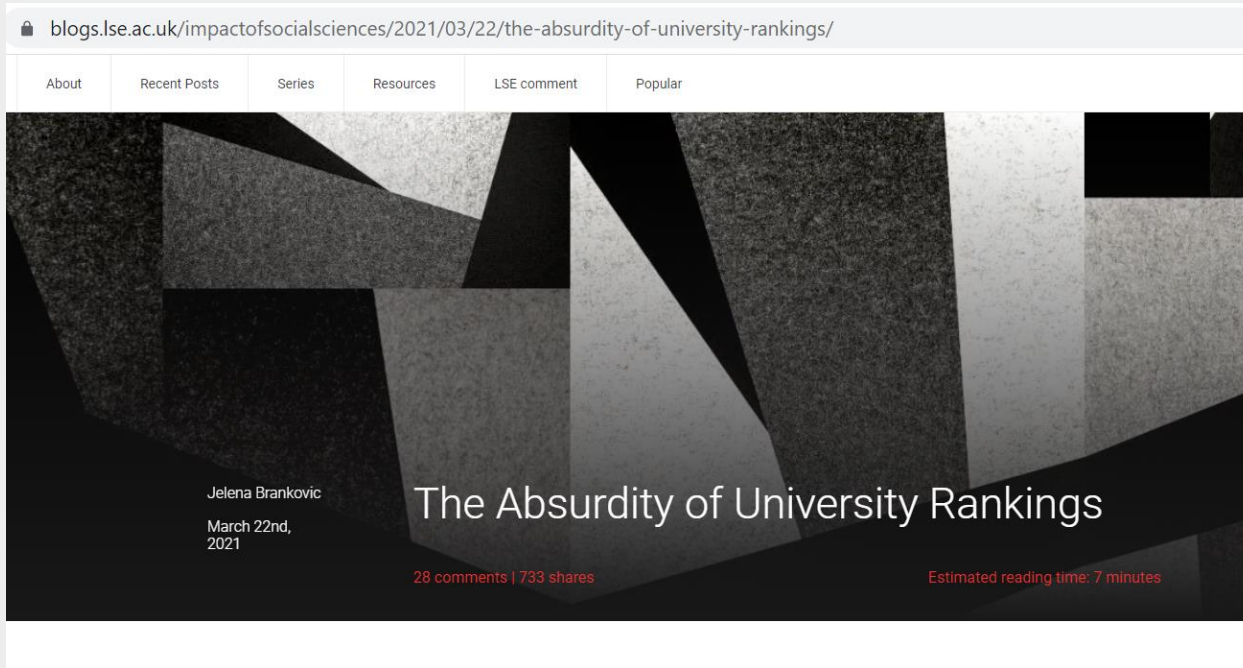
Reliability of data used  
Columbia University d

Gloria Oladipo in New York  
@gaoladipo  
Tue 13 Sep 2022 18:01 BST

**Table 1:** Michael Thaddeus’s attempt to replicate the data used in the ranking of his own institution, Columbia University.

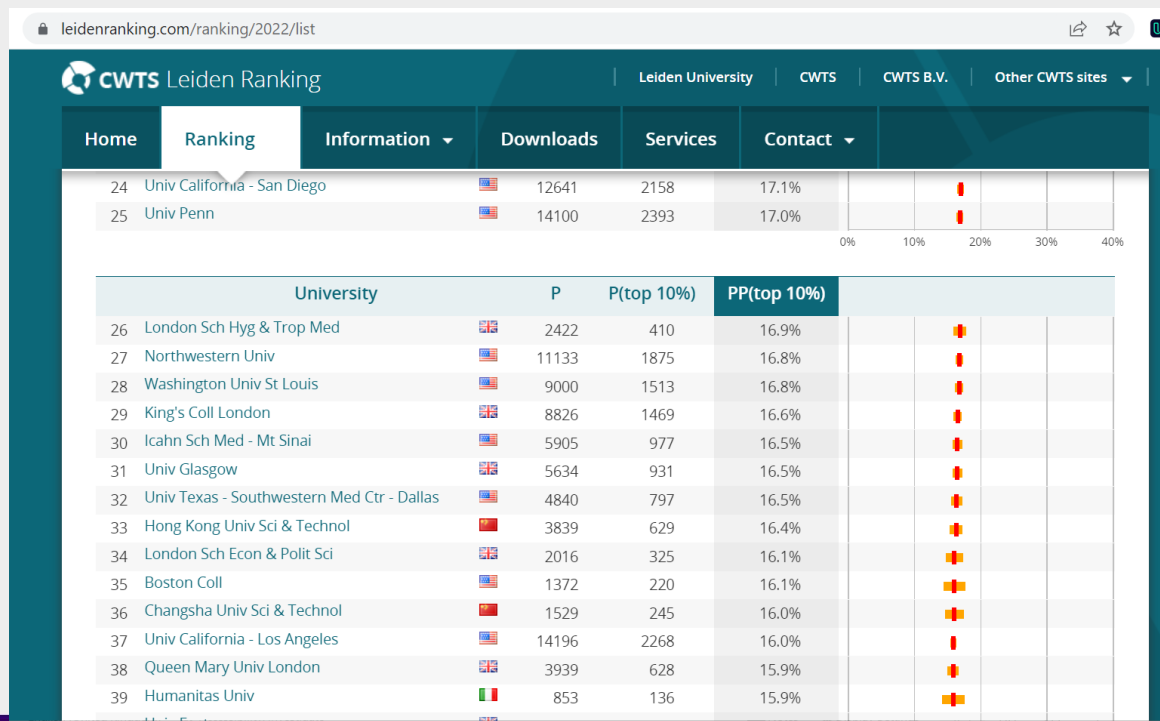
League table metric	Columbia	Prof Thaddeus’s estimate
Undergraduate classes with under 20 students	82.5%	62.7% to 66.9%
Full-time faculty with PhD or terminal degree	100%	96%
Percent faculty that is full-time	96.5%	74.1%
Student-faculty ratio	6 to 1	11 to 1
Financial resources per student	\$3.1 billion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

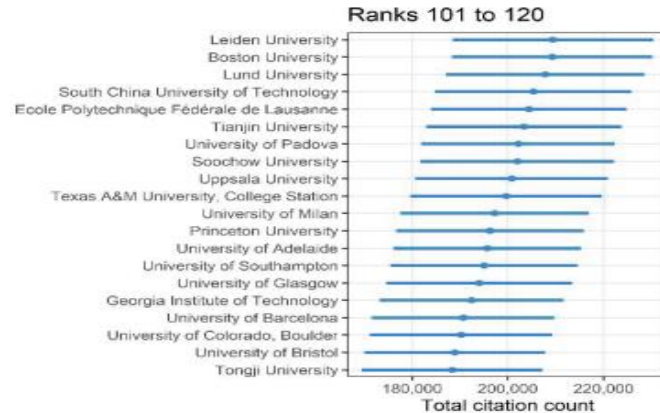
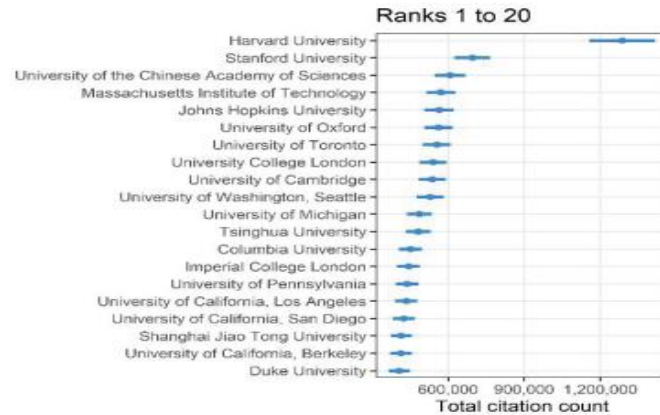


Figure 2: Total citation counts from 1,225 universities plus-and-minus an assumed 10% error.

# ARE THEY FAIR?

# Characteristics of a highly-ranked HEI

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



BRILL

Publications

Chapter 5 Why Are Our Rankings So White?

In: *Socially Responsible Higher Education*

Author: University Wankings

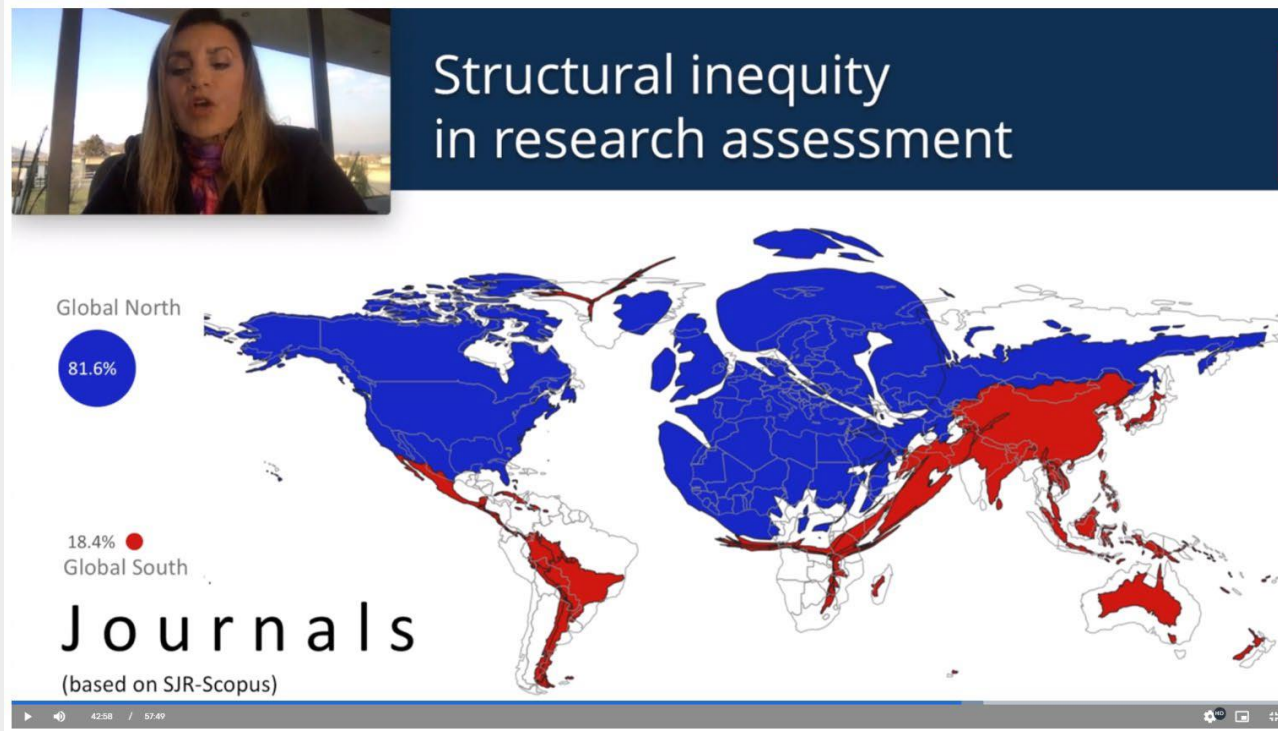
Type: Chapter

Pages: 67–79

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004459076\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004459076_006)



# Location of journals used in THE & QS Rankings



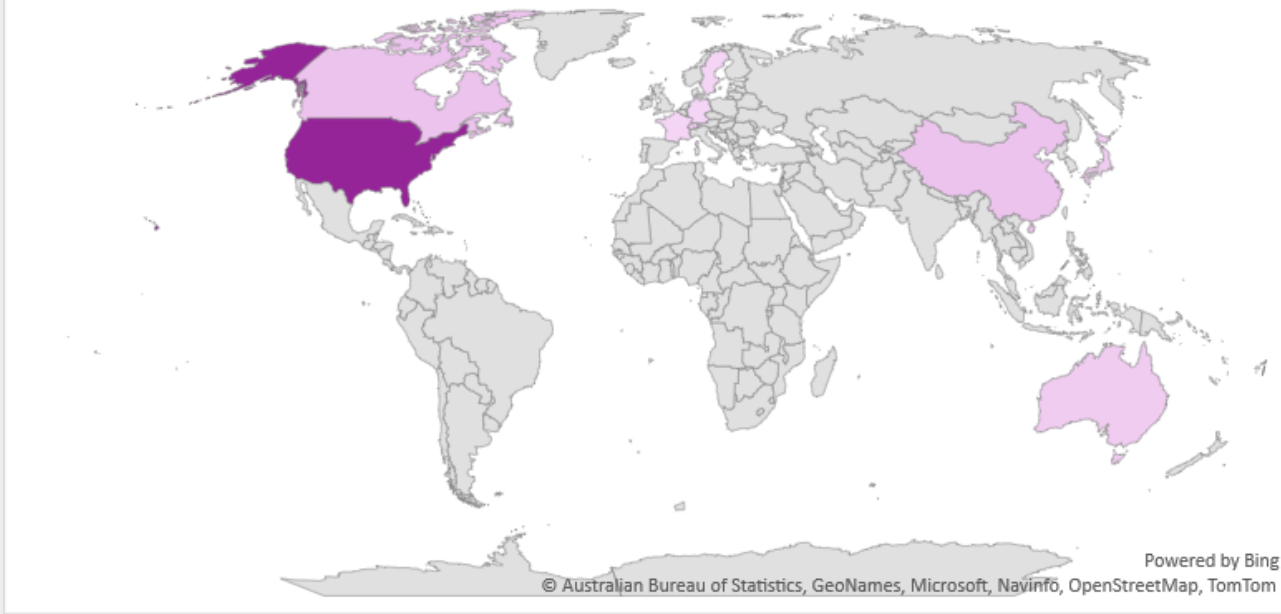
Arianna Becerril-García, Responsible Research  
Assessment Conference, GRC, November  
2020

# Location of top 20 HEIs in *THE* World Ranking 2023





## 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



**United Nations University**  
International Institute for Global Health

## **Statement on Global University Rankings**

Independent Expert Group (IEG) convened by the United Nations  
University International Institute for Global Health



**Loughborough  
University**

.....  
**#InspiringWinners** since 1909

## 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 Tremayne-Pengelly · 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 via Getty Images)



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29 September 2023

## Why UU is missing in the THE ranking

country.

Tweet

# 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.”







**WORLD 100**  
REPUTATION | INSIGHT | STRATEGY

## About The World 100

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.



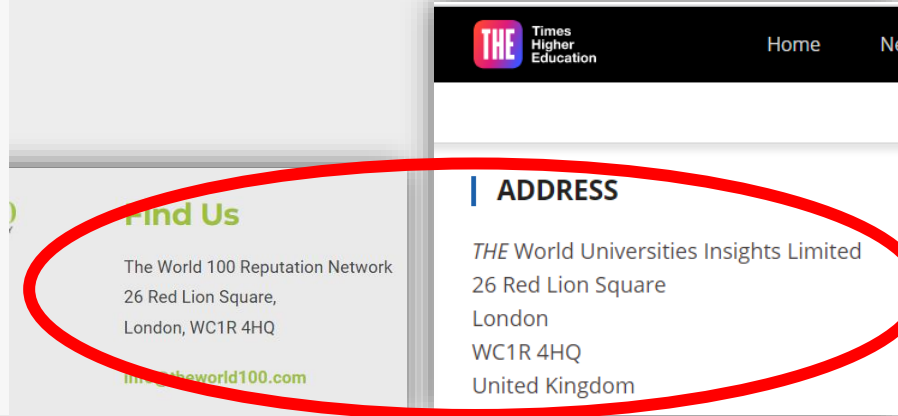
Of members improved or maintained their THE 2021 rank



Members made the top 50 places of AWRU 2021



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





**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?

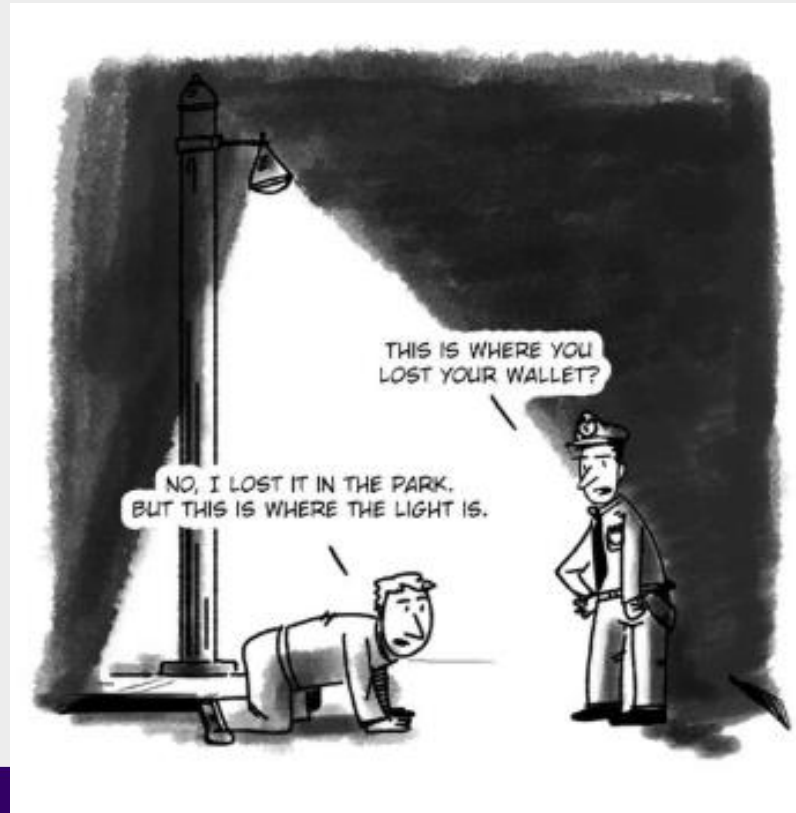
# Do they help students?

- Rankings offer no/poor assessments of teaching quality

## 3. Indicators and Weights for ARWU

Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
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%

# 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



# Union of Students in Ireland call on universities to cut ties with rankings

universitytimes.ie/2023/11/usi-and-tcdsu-call-to-cut-ties-with-university-rankings/

NEWS NOV 2, 2023


## USI and TCDSU Call to Cut Ties with University Rankings

In a motion passed at USI Council this evening and in a letter from the TCDSU to the Provost, student representatives are calling for College governing bodies to "re-evaluate their participation in university rankings" with the ultimate goal to withdraw from those they see as unfit.

Alex Payne  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

In a motion passed at USI Council this evening and in a letter from the TCDSU to the Provost, student representatives are calling for College governing bodies to "re-evaluate their participation in university rankings" with the ultimate goal to withdraw from those they see as unfit.

Both arguing against the "neoliberalisation of our institutions", the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and the Trinity College Dublin Students' Union (TCDSU) are using the example of Utrecht University's recent withdrawal from the Times Higher Education World Rankings for 2024 to highlight their perceived issues with partaking in a ranking system which the USI describes as an "inherently biased" and the TCDSU claims is unfair.



Eavan McLoughlin for The University Times

# 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”

# Lots of advice!



# Use of *the rankings*

- **Institutional decisions should not be driven by rankings**
  - Universities should follow holistic institutional strategies, instead of investing considerable time and energy in improving rankings results.
  - Do not use rankings in evaluations, for budget allocation purposes and in other policy contexts.

# Communication about *the rankings*

- Universities also have a duty to educate external stakeholders in the uses and misuses of rankings
- Encourage students to conduct their own research rather than just using rankings.
- An institution's decision for or against participating in a ranking exercise should be clearly explained and communicated, as should the meaning of any given outcome or score.



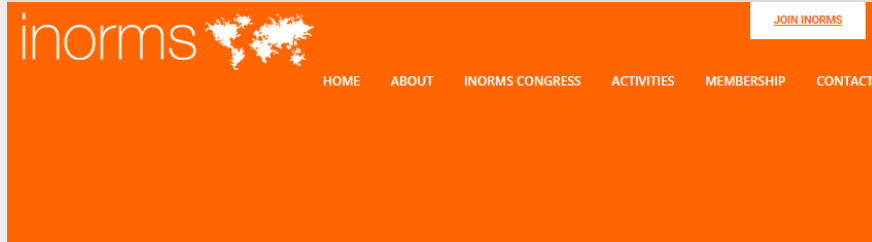
# Collaboration with *the rankings*

- Consider:
  - Not submitting data and information for commercial ranking purposes **or**
  - ...making the submitted data also publicly available on their websites.
  - Not participating in reputation surveys distributed by rankers.
  - Not purchasing products and services from the commercial rankers.
  - Not hosting or participating in events organised by the commercial rankers.

# Alternatives to *the rankings*

- Support and engage with initiatives promoting better ways of assessing university performance.
  - U-Multirank (quantitative)
  - More Than Our Rank (qualitative)

# Sign up to More Than Our Rank



“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.”



## 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.

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

	University		P	P(top 10%)	PP(top 10%)			
51	Roy Holloway - Univ London		1047	120	11.5%			
52	Heriot-Watt Univ		1621	184	11.4%			
53	Keele Univ		9					
54	This university participates in the <i>More Than Our Rank</i> initiative.		12					
55	Nottingham Trent Univ		10					
56	Univ W England - Bristol		9					
57	Loughborough Univ		25					
58	Univ Kent		16					
59	Univ Huddersfield		10					
60	Univ Portsmouth		13					
61	Coventry Univ		12					
62	Bournemouth Univ		8					
63	Open Univ		9					
64	Sheffield Hallam Univ		8					

The More Than Our Rank logo displayed next to the names highlights that these universities are More Than Our Rank signatories.



More Than Our Rank signatories are highlighted in orange.

## 10. We know that universities are much, much more than their rank

The data that underpins our portfolio of rankings covers a vast array of vital university activities: teaching, research, knowledge transfer, financial health, reputation, inclusion, student outcomes, social and economic impact, and sustainability. They offer a sophisticated set of benchmarks and insights that can be tailored to suit multiple missions in many different contexts. But we also fully understand that data alone can never capture all the extraordinary ways that universities contribute to our world.

# 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](mailto:E.a.gadd@lboro.ac.uk)
- Twitter: @INORMS\_REWG @LizzieGadd @CoARAssessment
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