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**Author**

KARRAN, Terence (MALLINSON, Lucy)

**Title**

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**Abstract**

Using empirical data from over 1500 respondents (drawn from across the UK) to a survey on academic freedom, and the Times Higher's World University Rankings, this paper is a comparative assessment of the relationship between professed levels of de facto protection for academic freedom by teaching and research staff in individual UK universities, and their institution's excellence, as evinced by world university rankings. The study reveals that normative protection for academic freedom is strongest in Russell Group universities and weakest in post-1992 institutions. Additionally, the professed level of protection for academic freedom reported by respondents to the survey is shown to have a positive relationship with the World Rankings' positions of their institutions. Furthermore, the study considers whether academic freedom may be a prerequisite for, or defining characteristic of, a world-class university. Finally, the paper assesses the possible policy implications of this research for universities and their leaders, and higher educational policy makers, within the UK and beyond,

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seeking to improve the Times Higher's World Ranking positions of their institutions. (HRK / Abstract  
übernommen)