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**Abstract**

In little over a decade since their introduction, global rankings are perceived as having significant and problematic effects. The dominant 'normative' research orientation applied to the research domain of rankings is identified as a contributory factor to the sustained interest in rankings. The paper argues for a 'close-up' research orientation at this juncture to open up the debate and draw attention to alternative narratives of excellence in higher education through a discourse-analytic approach. The paper draws on an analysis of the use of global rankings by higher education sector 'mission groups' to influence national policy in the United Kingdom, with particular focus on lobbying texts produced by these groups in the period surrounding the United Kingdom general election. The analysis demonstrates the strategic struggle for positioning in relation to higher education policy and reflects the different narratives of self-identification of the mission groups. The study draws attention to ways global university rankings mediate discourse and activity and illuminates alternative discourses that

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respond to rankings.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)