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Global university rankings and their impact

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Abstract

EUA has published a major new report 'Global University Rankings and their Impact' that analyses the methodologies used in the main international university rankings and also refers to a number of other ongoing projects seeking to measure university performance. EUA commissioned this report as a response to the recent growth in international and national rankings, and as a result of increasing

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questions from its members requesting information and advice on such rankings. The report was presented to an audience of nearly 150 university leaders from EUA member institutions and higher education experts from across Europe as the central part of the EUA Rankings Seminar held in Brussels on Friday 17 June. The main findings of the report were presented by author Professor Andrejs Rauhvargers who stressed that higher education policy decisions should not be based solely on rankings data. The event then included two panel debates, focusing on the report and the different strengths and weaknesses of international rankings, which involved different stakeholders from the university sector, the European Commission, ranking providers and student bodies. It is clear that despite their shortcomings, rankings are here to stay, the EUA report notes, quoting a recent European Commission report, that they enjoy a high level of acceptance among stakeholders and the wider public because of their simplicity and consumer type information. Predicting a rise in the number of rankings in the future, the report argues that it is vital for universities and different stakeholders to be aware of the degree to which rankings are transparent, and from a user's perspective, of the relationship between what it is stated is being measured and what is in fact being measured, how the scores are calculated and, even more importantly, what they mean. The report also argues that the main international university rankings provide an oversimplified picture of institutional mission, quality and performance, as they focus mainly on indicators related to the research function of universities. It also makes the case that the benefits rankings offer, be it through fostering accountability or encouraging the collection of more reliable data, are outweighed by a lack of transparency and by unwanted consequences. Such consequences include a growing tendency for universities to invest in activities that will improve their position in the rankings rather than in core areas such as teaching and learning. This EUA Rankings Review project was made possible by funding from the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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