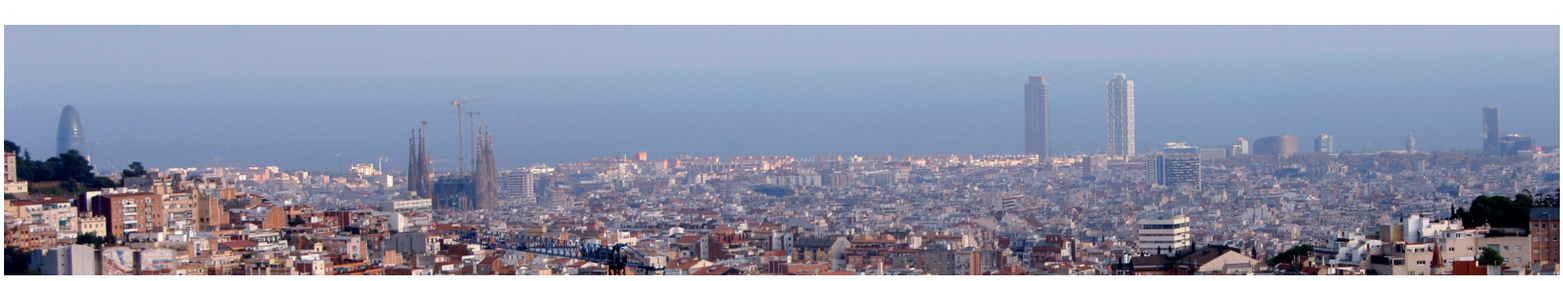
First International Seminar on Higher Education Rankings and e-Learning

Proceedings



Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

22-23 September 2011 - CaixaForum, Barcelona

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First International Seminar on Higher Education Rankings and e-Learning

22-23 September 2011 - CaixaForum, Barcelona

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PRESENTATION

University rankings have been around for at least a couple of decades now, with some sources making a case that they go as far back as the XIV century, implicit in the recognition of the Universities of Prague, Paris and Oxford as the sole of university textbooks of the time. Be that as it may, higher education performance evaluation tools have since proliferated, both at the regional and international level.

No matter what the criticism levied against the various rankings now being produced, it is undeniable that they provide, in one form or another, useful instruments for benchmarking.

Rankings, nonetheless, have so far not kept abreast of the profound changes in higher education brought about by the opportunities offered by the ICTs, and have not – with counted exceptions – included online education in their studies.

Today most universities have, to varying degrees, adopted the Internet as a delivery mode to complement their traditional teaching. A few universities, such our own, actually teach exclusively online, and there are staggering growth perspectives in the online student population as internet-based education gains legitimacy and is being identified as a rigorous, viable and economically sustainable alternative to residential universities.

Are rankings likely to focus on eLearning in the near future? If so, what parameters will be employed and who will be defining those? What impact will they have on online education? If not, are present rankings of any use to online education institutions for benchmarking purposes?

I am pleased to welcome you to the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's 1st International Seminar on Higher Education Rankings and e-Learning and look forward to stimulating and insightful presentations and discussions among all participants.

Welcome to Barcelona!

Dr. Imma Tubella i Casadevall
President
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Academic rankings New developments

Tony Stevenson
(Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Planning and Resources, Newcastle University)

Tony Stevenson is Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Planning and Resources and Professor of Geography at Newscastle University.

Prof. Stevenson runs the University's strategic planning and budgeting exercise (£350m) including chairing the main budgetary committees, which succeded in generating surpluses of £15m pa over the last three years for investment.

Tony Stevenson's other Executive Board responsibilities include leading: development of the University's Estate strategy; data management and the development of key performance indicators. He is the project chair for a number of new building projects. He is also leading the development, under the project '2012' umbrella, of the new undergraduate fee regime, including: introduction of innovative widening participation arrangements; reviewing and redefining the student offer; and proposing postgraduate fees post implementation of the new undergraduate fee regime.

Prof. Stevenson leads the University's Environmental Sustainability Strategy including development of a Carbon Management Plan.

He leads and chairs the Financial Monitoring and Budget Scrutiny Group, Estate and Sustainability special interest group; Staff committee; Strategic Systems Group and is deputy chair of the Budget Setting Group and a member of Finance Committee.
His research interests are in recent environmental change in the European uplands including peat erosion and fluctuations in ericaceae-dominated plant communities, history of interaction between humans, climate and vegetation in the western Mediterranean, and the history of woodland management in the Mediterranean region.

Thank you very much, John, and again I'd like to thank the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya for actually inviting me here.

I suspect what I'm going to say will just reinforce most of the points that both Gero and Endika have already made. And the theme for what I want to say, really, is that ranking does not equal comparability. Now, the trouble is rankings are very, very seductive, and people always want to know the best, although they don't necessarily know what they want in terms of the best of what. So we need to really define what are universities good at, and we know that different universities are good at very different things. But all that rankings try and do is just condense them into a single ordinal scale. And that then gets reported in the papers and then that's defined as the best.

And in that way, I wanted to take you to a thought experiment in a minute. But, as Gero and Endika have already mentioned, most ranking systems aim to rank the top 50 or 250 worldwide institutions. But we know there are at least 15,000. I think, a bit like the numbers of students in most of our universities, we don't actually know how many students we've got, let alone do we know how many higher-education institutions we've got. And we know there are various national ranking systems; there were over 50 at the last count – some examples there – and we know there are some international rankings, which have been developing mostly over the last 10-15 years, starting off with the Jiaotong ranking, and then the QS ranking that Gero mentioned, and then they split from the Times Higher Education ranking, who went off with Thomson Reuters, and then you have one here in Barcelona based on Webometrics, which is the number of Web accesses you get to a particular system.

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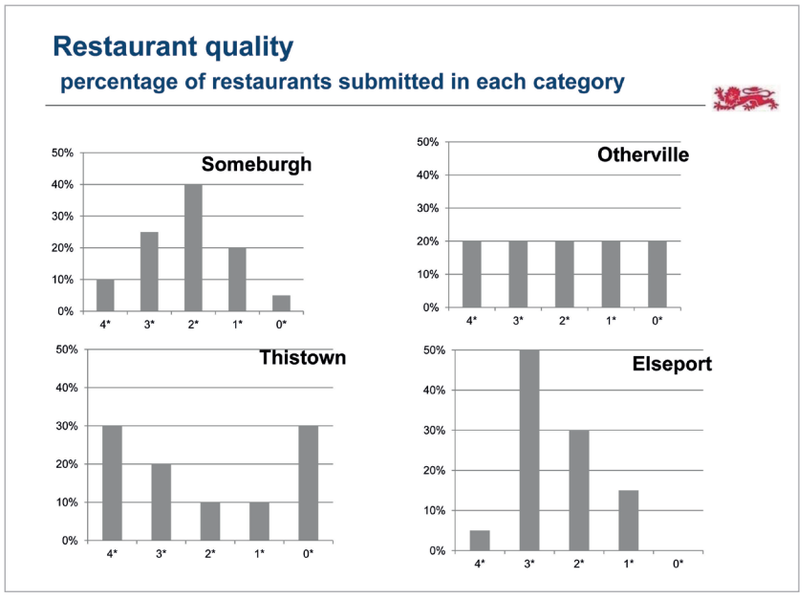
by Tony Stevenson

But before I get to the substance, I just want to take you through a thought experiment. And instead of using universities I'm going to use restaurants. After some extensive consultation, we invented a rating system for restaurants. We gave them a star system. We said that some were world-class; we said they were four-star. Some were renowned at across Europe; we said they were three-star. Some were only known nationally; they were two-star. One-stars were only acceptable, and no-stars were just poor.

And you can graph those, for these particular towns, which we just picked and are totally and utterly fictitious: Someburgh, Otherville, Thistown and Elseport.



You can see the percentages along the axis of the number of four-star, three-star, two-star and one-star restaurants in each of those towns. The question is, which is best? What do you mean "which is best?"

And I'll just take you through a little set of thought experiments that will just reinforce the point that Endika and Gero have just made. Sometimes people will just want to use a grade point average. And so because four-stars are better than three-stars, we can just weight them 4 to 3 to 2 to 1, as advocated by the publication *Gastronomy Times*. Or we can use a double rating that says four-stars are so much better than one-stars that they should have a rating of 16. *Restaurant Fortnight* happens to have a rating system that has weights for those particular things: 16 to 9 to 4 to 1. And then there's another publication called the *Association for Haute Cuisine* that basically says, "Well, we really ought to have just a medals table, and we'll construct a medals table based on the number of four-stars, or the number of four-star plus three-star medals." And when you actually play with the numbers, you plug them in, then basically you get slightly different rank orders depending on those weights. So for the *Gastronomy Times*, Elseport comes top, for *Restaurant Fortnight,* Thistown becomes top. And the actual rankings of the individual towns in these elements change depending on the weights of the ranking and the ranking tool, or algorithm, that you're actually using. And ditto if you use the so-called four-star medal table, the *AHC* gold-medal table. On this table you get a slightly different hierarchy of ranking, and if you use the gold- and silver-medal table you get a different set of rankings.

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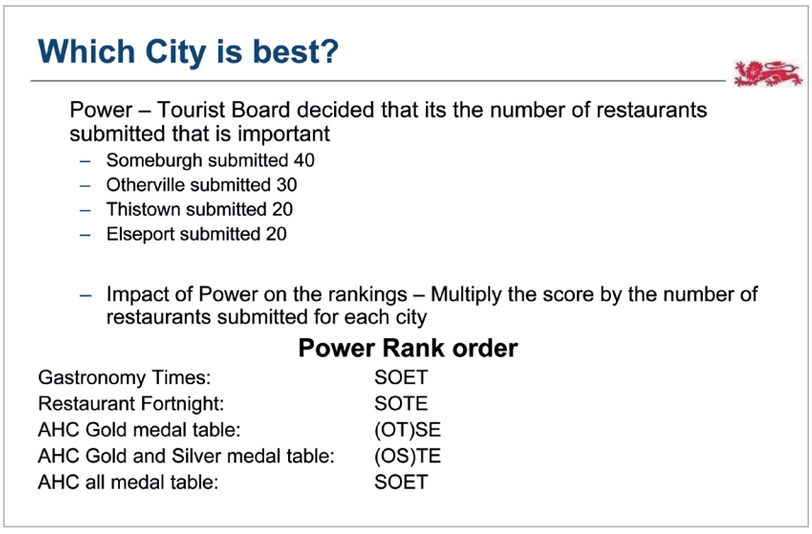
However, the tourist board in the particular area decided that it's the number of restaurants that are submitted that are important, and that's effectively a function of power. And Someburgh submitted 40 of its restaurants and Elseport only submitted 20 of its restaurants. So when you actually plug the concept of power into that, then the power rank order of those restaurants and those towns changes quite dramatically.



And so on the slide you can see that Someburgh – because it submitted 40 restaurants – has a big impact on the power ranks and becomes top of this particular list. And again, the others are ordered all down. Remember, this is the same data and same parameters, but they are weighted differently and are subject to other manipulations with the algorithm.

But the Chamber of Commerce also pointed out that some of these cities may have been playing a game, and they only submitted what they thought were good restaurants. So Someburgh submitted 40 of its 64 restaurants, Otherville actually submitted most of its restaurants, and the others did to varying degrees. So when you actually plug that in, and you actually effectively down-weigh Someburgh because it submitted very few of its restaurants, then the rank order changes again. And this time Otherville tops all of the rankings.

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by Tony Stevenson

Which City is best?

BUT: the Chamber of Commerce point out that cities may have played a game and only submitted what they thought were good restaurants

They discover that their database reveals that:

- Someburgh submitted 40 out of 64 restaurants in total
- Otherville submitted 30 out of 33
- Thistown submitted 20 out of 40
- Elseport submitted 20 out of 30

So you can adjust game playing by altering (downweighting) the power scores by the proportion submitted

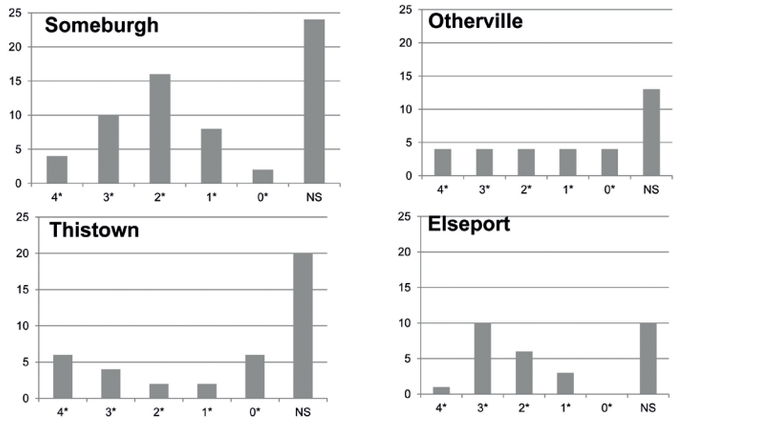
Ratio Rank order

Gastronomy Times:	OEST
Restaurant Fortnight:	OETS
AHC Gold medal table:	OTSE
AHC Gold and Silver medal table:	O(ET)S
AHC all medal table:	OEST

Now, all of this illustrates that you can basically use the same data and you can prove absolutely anything. So, of all of those towns, which has the best restaurants? And that applies to all rankings you see worldwide, basically. And, of course, those of you who might be particularly familiar with the British Research Assessment Exercise might actually see some similarities to the various weightings and debates that have been taking place.

Now I think – a bit just like Gero – that actually a simple graphical representation is the comparability that I think we should aim for.

Comparability



So here, all I've done is add the "Not submitted" numbers to each of the towns. And there you begin to see – the shape gives you some indication – which are best from your particular perspective. So you can see Someburgh has submitted very few of its restaurants, whereas Elseport has submitted most of them. So I think simple graphical representations are actually a far better way of looking at the data than what we currently have. We're just trying to collapse it into a single ordinal figure.

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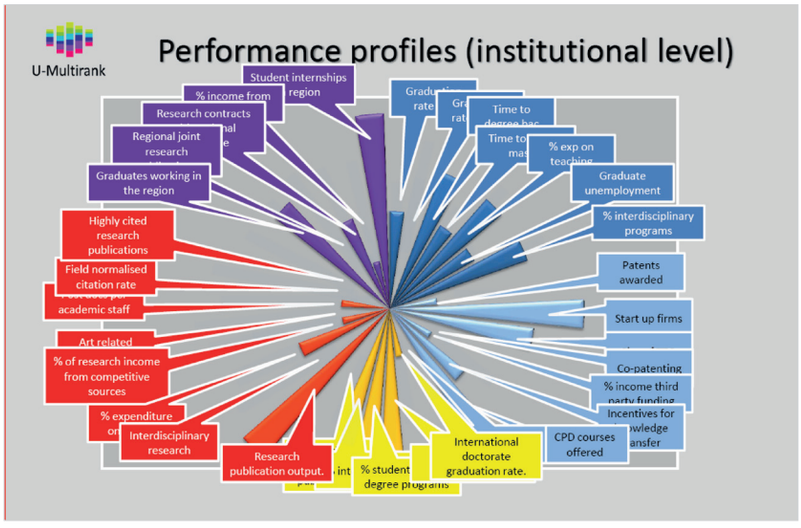
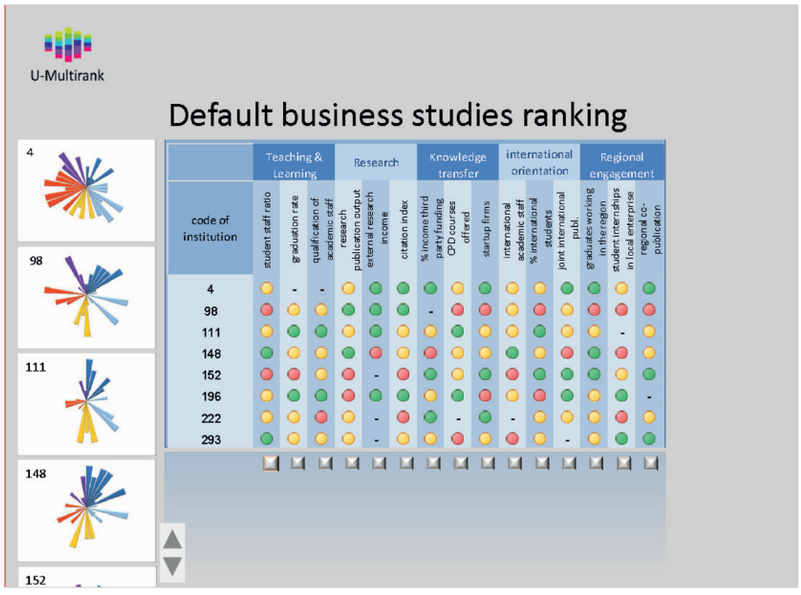
Now of course I suspect that everyone will just always want to collapse it all into a single ordinal figure, despite our best attempts at going down a transparency route. And – as I said – here are just some slides I've pinched from Gero's website when they launched U-Multirank back in June, I think.





As you said, you've got, I think, 23 or 24 different parameters you can measure on it. There's actually quite a lot of information, and I think, even when you produce the data – something like this for the default business-studies ranking – I'm not quite sure that your average student will actually be able to grasp that data and actually begin to visualize it and contextualize it, or even their parents. So I think one of the challenges for these transparency tools that use multi-ranking systems is that we need to have some simple, graphical, immediate linkages and presentations to the users. Otherwise I think people will just keep playing with it and they'll get extremely confused.

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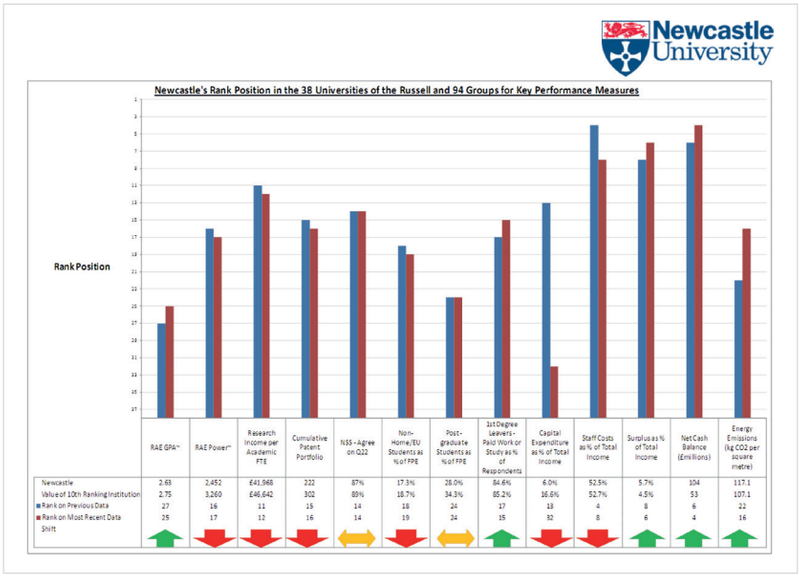

Now interestingly, at Newcastle – you don't need to know the detail of this particular slide – at the moment we do not use our position in any of the rankings as a report back to our governing body. What we do do – and this is just a related set of key performance indicators – is measure our rank against most of what we consider to be the best universities in the UK. So in this case it's the Russell Group, of which we are a member, which are mostly universities with medical schools, and then the so-called 94 Group, because it was set up in 1994 and is a mixture of what are called the red-brick universities within the UK.

And all we produce for our governing body is the research performance and that which comes out of the research assessment exercise that is run every six to seven years in the UK. We have a research-income-per-academic-FTE component, we have some bits on patents, and the UK runs a national student survey exercise every single year and so we've got our data on our national position in that. We've got some data on the number of EU students and post-graduate students, which are important for us as our major strategy. Our employability statistics are quite important to us now, especially given the recent changes in English higher education. And I say English rather than British as a result of the change in the fee regime. Students will become far more interested in their employability prospects, or not necessarily the students but their parents certainly will. And then there are some other things around capital expenditure, staff costs, our surplus, and finally at the end we do have a mission to be sustainable, so there is an energy emissions ranking system as well. Although, of course, we are beginning to fail in that because we've just opened a large campus in Singapore and are doing one in Malaysia, so our emissions per FT are going through the roof at the moment.

But that is where we sit in terms of our rank position, on an annual basis, which we report annually to our council. Now, interestingly – as you'll see – on quite a few of these we are middle-ranked. So our council is now asking, "How can we get better, and why aren't we wanting to become number five in the *Times* table or number 10 in *Times QS*?"

I have a real worry that most governing bodies don't really understand ranking systems and that what rankings do is beginning to constrain university missions. And so, in conclusion,

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what I would say is that difference does not necessarily reflect ordering; you've seen that from the little thought experiment. The interests of the ranker affect the results as much as any intrinsic qualities of those being ranked. And the trouble is, ranking systems create reality and they constrain university missions. And part of the reason why our council are beginning to ask us about where we actually sit within ranking systems is that they want to be the best. But the question is, the best at what?

And so, is a university excellent? How do we measure it? And lots of universities have differentiated in their missions. And in all of this I worry that with the ranking systems diversity is replacing hierarchy and networks of power, and social and geographical perspective. And I think, like Gero, that simple graphical representations can be richer than linear scales to compare quality. But, as he says, rankings are here to stay. But let's have lots and lots and lots of them because the one on the slide confuses the users.

Thank you very much.

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Gero Federkeil
(Vice President, IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence)

Gero Federkeil is Project Manager at the CHE - Centre for Higher Education, Guetersloh, Germany. He is responsible for CHE ranking and international ranking activities at CHE, including the U-Multirank project funded by the European Union. In October 2009, he has been elected Vice-President of IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence.
He is an internationally recognized expert in the field of rankings. His main fields of work and publications include rankings, performance indicators, benchmarking, quality assurance and issues of employability/university - labour market relations. He is a member of the German Association of Evaluation and a team member of the CHERPA Network.
Before joining the CHE in 200 he worked for the German Council of Science and Humanities for seven years in the field of higher education policy, labour market and higher education, investments in higher education, evaluation and university medicine.
He holds a Master Degree in Sociology (1989) from Bielefeld University.

Thank you very much, and thank you to the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya for inviting me to this conference. Maybe it's just a coincidence: but around the same day that I received the invitation to this conference we at the CHE, my organization, were contacted by a group of private German institutions that are active in the field of distance-learning programmes and part-time programmes for employed people to discuss how these kinds of programmes could be better represented in our ranking. So obviously rankings are an issue for distance-learning institutions and open universities at the moment.

I was asked to give an overview on recent trends and rankings. I will first do this in a more general way, and then try to show you how this new European initiative and this U-Multirank project fits into those recent trends.

Before I start, please allow me briefly to introduce the CHE to you. I assume that most of you do not know my institution. The CHE, the Centre for Higher Education, is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1994 by the German Rectors' Conference, the Association of German Universities, and the Bertelsmann Foundation, a private foundation that is active in the field of private-sector reform. Bertelsmann is a big media company in Germany. The goal of the CHE is to initiate and promote reforms in the German higher-education sector. Our activities include dealing with all kinds of policy issues on higher education. We are working on the implementation of the Bologna Process; the funding of higher education, and things like that. We have a separate branch that does consultancy work, both for universities and for governments. As you know, Germany is a federal state, with the 16 states responsible for higher education. In addition, we are doing some training and communication programmes. And, last but not least, we do a ranking of – originally – German universities. One of the founding tasks of the CHE was to develop a ranking of universities. Our first ranking was published in 1998, so we now have more than ten years' experience in this business. It started with a small number of pilot fields, then it was gradually extended to other fields and indicators, and we were continuously further developing our methodology. It began as a national ranking of German universities but then, starting in 2003 and 2004, we began, step by step, to internationalize our ranking by including

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universities first from Austria, then Switzerland, and finally the Netherlands. So now the CHE ranking is, in a way, a cross-national-regional ranking for this region of Europe. Now we are cooperating with the Fundación CYD to develop a ranking of Spanish universities, and I think we will hear more about this project in one of the later sessions. And of course we were part of the U-Multirank Project and the CHE is also a founding member of the IREG Observatory on academic rankings.

Let me begin with the traditional ranking approach, which a Canadian colleague, Alex Usher, called "ranking orthodoxy". As I want to show later, normally where there is an orthodoxy there are some new, alternative approaches, some deviances from this orthodoxy, too. The orthodox ranking approach is characterized by three basic features. Looking, for example, at the Shanghai Ranking, we first produced a ranking of entire universities across their fields. This means we see the aggregated result for Harvard compared to Stanford and the other universities. Second, traditional rankings calculate an overall composite indicator, which means one single number is analyzing and describing the performance of such a complex system as a university. This approach indicates that a university with a score of 69.6 is better than another with a score of 64.4. And last but not least, traditional rankings produce league tables with individual rank positions from 1 to 200 or 500 or whatever, like a football league table.

There are a number of critical arguments against orthodox rankings. First, most users of rankings are interested in having comparative information about "their" field. Students and prospective students want to find out about the performance of institutions in the field they want to study. Researchers want to be compared with others working in their field and not with an average of all fields at another university. Institutional rankings thus often give misleading averages across the fields and the departments of a university. A university might have a very good department of history and at the same time a not-so-good department of psychology. Those differences, which in many cases reflect the strategic vision of the university, are blurred by institutional rankings.

The second argument refers to the use of composite indicators. Composite indicators blur different profiles and strengths and weaknesses of universities. Some universities, even within a field, perform quite differently with regard to different dimensions of their activities. Some are very good in research and maybe not so good in teaching. Or they focus on undergraduate teaching and are not very active in research. This again is blurred by the use of composite indicators. Finally, there are neither theoretical nor empirical arguments for assigning a particular weight to a particular indicator, which has to be done if you want to calculate a composite indicator.

This can be illustrated by the weighting used in existing rankings such as the Shanghai and QS rankings.

World Rankings: Indicators & Weights

CHE

Shanghai Jiaotong Ranking		QS	
Indicator	Weight	Indicator	Weight
SCI publications	20 %	Reputation among scholars	40 %
Publications Science & Nature	20 %	Reputation among employers	10 %
Highly cited authors	20 %	Citations	20 %
Nobel Prizes & Field Medals	20 %	Student-staff-ratio	20 %
Alumni with NobelPrizes	10 %	International students	10 %
Size	10 %	International staff	10 %

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This is the list of their indicators and their weights. But why does the Shanghai ranking give a 20% weight to highly cited authors and 10% to alumni with Nobel Prizes, and why does the QS ranking give 40% to reputation among scholars and 10% to international students, rather than, say, 30% and 15%? Empirical studies have shown that those weighting schemes are anything but robust. Slight changes in the weighting scheme can lead to big changes in the results of the ranking. But there is an additional, very basic argument: different users of rankings have different ideas about quality and about the relevance of indicators. This basic argument is neglected by the use of composite indicators. Students probably look at different indicators to researchers. And even students are not a homogeneous group. From our own experiences we know that some students look for a small university where they have very close, direct contact with teachers, while others may look for a big, internationally oriented university, and hence they would like to look at different indicators. Using a composite indicator with pre-defined weights for individual indicators patronizes the users of the rankings.

Last but not least, the league-table approach, with its clear individual ranking positions, shows which institution is number one. Of course, maybe this is what the media want to know, who is number one. If we look at league-table rankings, we see that in many cases small differences in the numerical value of an indicator lead to big differences in league-table positions. This gives a false impression of precision because this approach indicates that number 123 is better than number 128, and that number 501 is better than number 510. But, from a methodological point of view, the league-table approach does not take into account that the data do not have that degree of precision, that there are some uncertainties in the data too.

So the question is, are there alternatives? Are there more meaningful new trends that deviate from this traditional, orthodox ranking system. My answer is that there are. On the one hand we see that there are completely different approaches, and the U-Multirank Project that I am going to present in more detail afterwards is one of them. On the other hand we have also seen some changes within the existing rankings, both nationally and internationally. Looking at the latter, we have seen that the global rankings, both the Shanghai and the QS rankings, for example, have introduced, in addition to their institutional rankings, field-based rankings, or at least rankings of broad groups of fields like engineering and natural sciences. They have reacted to the ongoing criticism of institutional rankings. And, at least in the lower tiers of the rankings, they have introduced broad groups instead of exact league-table positions. For example, the Shanghai ranking still calculates a league table from number 1 to 50. But below position 50 they introduce those broader groups as from 51-75, 76-100, and so on, without distinguishing among the universities within those broader groups. But despite those changes in some aspects of their methodologies and despite the introduction of some elements of more interactive and user-driven features in the ranking (where users could, for example, choose their own weights for indicators), the majority of rankings still follow this traditional approach, in particular by using composite indicators.

But there is a growing number of rankings with an alternative approach. Our own ranking activities at the CHE are among them. Taiwan has the “College Navigator” which, like the CHE ranking, also aims to give information to prospective students. Another example is the “Good University Guide” in Australia, and hopefully the new Spanish ranking project will also be one example of those kinds of approaches. On the international level the U-Multirank project will follow a new approach, but there are others, too. The Leiden Ranking, for instance, is a completely bibliometric ranking published by our colleagues from the CWTS at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. They use bibliometric indicators but they do not aggregate them or combine them into a single composite indicator.

What is the basic idea, or what is the basic rationale for multidimensional rankings? As I already mentioned, there is no single objective ranking, and there is no single objective concept of quality. Quality lies in the eye of the beholder. Different stakeholders, different users of rankings, have different ideas of the quality of a university. This should be taken seriously by rankings.

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Clearly every ranking reflects the views of the people who produce it because they have to define the set of indicators it will include. They must therefore make decisions about those indicators that are not regarded as relevant and are excluded from the rankings. Even the producers of multidimensional rankings have to make this decision about which indicators to include and which to exclude, even without calculating an overall composite indicator. But we believe the set of indicators included should be broad to cover the information needed and the preferences of different stakeholders. The definition and selection of indicators should be based on stakeholder consultation, which was a very important and intensive step in the U-Multirank project. We did several workshops and surveys among stakeholders to learn which indicators they think are relevant, because the selection of indicators in rankings should be based mainly on the relevance of the indicators and not merely on whether data are available or how easily available they are.

The decision about the relevance among those indicators available in a ranking should be left to the users of the rankings. This means that multidimensional rankings do not calculate composite indicators with pre-defined weights for individual indicators. Instead, they show differences in performance profiles. This implies that multidimensional rankings do not identify a number 1 or number 10 institution because the results can differ for each indicator.

Hence an alternative ranking approach – and this is drawn from the CHE ranking – is field-based, or at least both field-based and institutional. I think if we agree that a university is more than just a sum of its faculties, there is an interest in having some information on the strategic dimension of the whole institution. But at the same time it is important to have field-based information. The CHE ranking currently has 34 fields, and in the results we see that the universities are very different in regard to the performance of their different departments. Of course there are some universities that perform very well in most of their fields, but there are a number that have a very clear profile with good performance in one field, or group of fields, and a poorer performance in other fields. Furthermore, rankings should be multidimensional, and instead of calculating a league table, both in the CHE ranking and in the U-Multirank project we suggested using a number of groups of universities only. In the CHE ranking, for instance, universities are ranked into three groups: a top group that is performing better than average, an average or middle group, and a bottom group that is performing below average. The CHE ranking includes 20 to 25 indicators, depending on the fields. Each indicator is independent and is not combined with others to form a single composite indicator. This allows us to show the different profiles and the different strengths and weaknesses. And it is user-driven. I will show you how this works in the Web-based ranking so the user can decide about the indicators and, as I said, we have these groups.

Let me now turn to the U-Multirank Project. It was a two-year project and it was about developing the concept and testing the feasibility of a new approach for a multidimensional international ranking. This means that we did not come up with a published ranking. It was all about the feasibility of this new instrument. Referred-Multirank refers to five dimensions of performance: teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation, and the regional engagement of universities. Over the course of the project we developed a long list of indicators, which were then tested in a pilot project. And of course we developed the data tools for data collection and analysis.

In U-Multirank we have two levels of analysis: indicators on institutional performance and indicators on field-based performance. In the pilot study two fields were included: business studies and engineering. We split engineering into mechanical and electrical engineering. In the pilot study, to collect the data and give us an impression on the availability and feasibility of data and indicators we included a sample of about 160 higher-education institutions. Not all of them were universities, and two-thirds of them were in Europe, with the rest from other parts of the world.

Now I want to go into more detail and explain the basic philosophy of the U-Multirank project. The starting point is the fact that there is a diversity of higher-education institutions in Europe and the world, so a ranking

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by Gero Federkeil

has to identify comparable institutions that could actually be compared in a meaningful way with regard to their structure, mission and profile. Clearly it does not make sense to compare a small, regional, teaching-oriented institution in the south of Germany with Oxford University. So we have to develop a tool to identify those institutions that can really be compared in one ranking. And this is where the European classification project, U-Map, comes in. U-Map is a tool to produce a description of the horizontal diversity of universities, in terms of different profiles of institutions. Those profiles are simply different, and U-Map does not say one profile is better than another or is performing better than another.

And on the other hand we have the rankings and the U-Multirank project. Here we want to assess performance in terms of vertical diversity. Both instruments, U-Map and U-Multirank, are complementary instruments to create transparency about higher education. In a way the classification tries to identify apples and oranges and then there is one ranking for apples and one for oranges. They should not be mixed together in a single ranking.

How does this work? The idea of U-Multirank is that users first have to select a comparable set of institutions based on U-Map. For each of the six dimensions there are a number of indicators. Based on these indicators the user can, for example, select institutions that are comprehensive, more teaching-oriented than research-oriented, and with a focus on undergraduate education with some activities like knowledge transfer. As a result the users get a sub-sample of institutions, which they can then compare in the ranking.

This means the resulting ranking is of this particular institutional profile. Of course the user could also choose a different profile based on U-Map, such as internationally oriented research universities that are covered by the existing global rankings. But this would be another ranking. The ranking offers a number of indicators for the five dimensions mentioned earlier. In the resulting ranking the rank groups are marked by colours: green in our case means the top group, yellow the middle group, and red the bottom group. The U-Multirank pilot study showed that no institutions were at the top for all indicators. Furthermore, there were no institutions ranked in the bottom group for all the indicators. This means that the institutions have different strengths, different weaknesses and different profiles, and this can be made visible by a multidimensional ranking. Calculating a composite indicator would lead to a picture where many of those institutions would have the same average score. But one would be strong in one dimension and others could be strong in another.

What makes the multidimensional approach most interesting, of course, are the interactive possibilities offered by web-based rankings. We do not live in the times of printed rankings anymore. I think virtually all rankings are web-based now.

As the U-Multirank system is not fully implemented yet, I will show you some screenshots from the CHE ranking, but this has the same logic and rationale that the U-Multirank will have.

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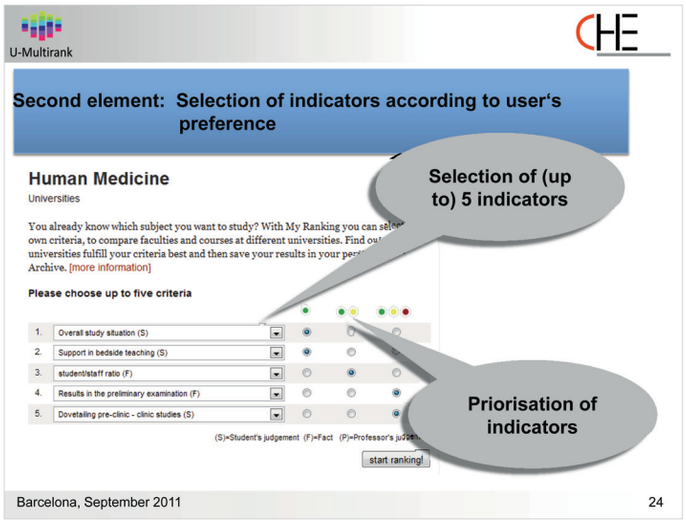

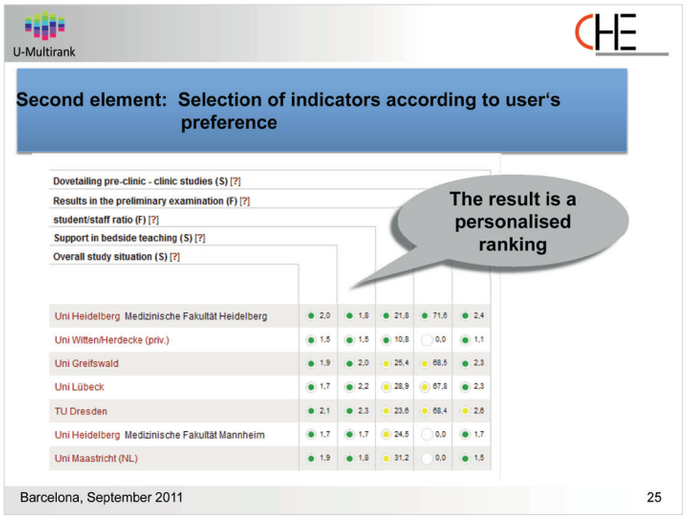

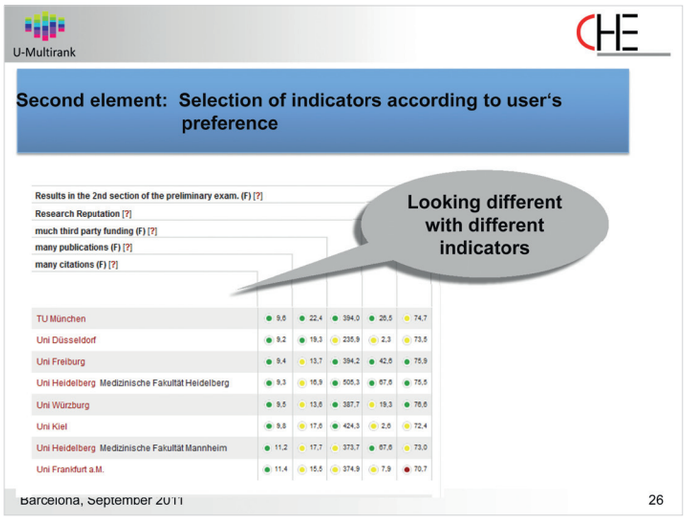

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Here is an example from the field of medicine. In the interactive, personalized ranking, the user can select up to five indicators out of the total of all indicators available, according to his own preferences and priorities. Next, the user can prioritize indicators by deciding he wants to see only those institutions that are ranked (at least) in a particular rank group (top or middle). As a result the user gets a personalized ranking. In the example, we have 7 (out of about 40) universities that fulfil the criteria selected.

Coming back to U-Multirank, the main purpose of U-Multirank was to test the feasibility of data collection and the feasibility of indicators. And, without going into too much detail, I want to show you this overview that shows the number of dimensions. FIR means institutional ranking and FBR field-based ranking. In the second column, the number of indicators that were tested is listed. Based on the experiences from the pilot study, the indicators were rated in terms of their feasibility. So we had a number of indicators in the A category where we did not face any major problems. Then we had another group – the B category – of indicators where we had some problems but where we think that it would be important and helpful to work further on those indicators, because they are highly relevant, although we could not yet collect the data in a sufficient way. Some indicators on employability belong to this B type of indicators. And we had some indicators in the C category; they were discarded in the end because they were not of highest relevance and the data were not available to a sufficient degree.

The summary of this table is that we did not have major problems with regard to the indicators looking at teaching and learning, research, and international orientation. We had the greatest problems with some indicators on knowledge transfer and regional engagement, in particular indicators looking at employability and business links. So those are the fields in which additional efforts to develop feasible indicators are most needed. But at the moment many universities do not collect any data on this or they collect them in different ways, with different definitions and measures. For example, many institutions and countries had some data on graduate employment, but they were not really comparable because they had different methodologies, different concepts of employability and different time references.

I do not want go into the details of the indicators, but just roughly go through them. We had a number of indicators on teaching and learning and for the field-based ranking, and this is – I believe – very interesting. We also included a survey among students to measure their satisfaction with different aspects of their programmes. This was very interesting because it is the first global survey where students assessed their own institution and assessed the quality of their own institution. At the beginning we were wondering if this would work in a global context, if students from different cultural contexts, from different countries, would assess their institutions in a comparable way. But in the end we thought that it worked. There are no systematic differences in the answering behaviour or in the standards between countries. But this has to be tested again when institutions and students know that the answers will go into a published ranking of their universities.

U-Multirank uses a number of indicators on research. Some of them are more traditional, bibliometric indicators which are also used by other rankings. At the same time, U-Multirank was able develop some new and innovative indicators based on bibliometric data. One of those new indicators are joint university-industry publications. Another new indicator of the regional engagement of institutions are co-publications with authors from the same region. This is what we had done so far. The first U-Multirank project has been finished and a report has just been published on the website of the European Commission. The major result is that multidimensional rankings are feasible on an international level, both in terms of the indicators and in terms of data collection. Now the question is what the future will be. In its communication on the modernisation of higher education the Commission expressed its intention to continue with U-Multirank. We are now waiting for a new call for tenders. The next step in a follow-up project will be the implementation of the U-Multirank system in a published ranking.

To come to my conclusions, we all know that rankings are here to stay and that their relevance will increase rather than decrease. There is a need for transparency about higher education, both nationally and internationally. From a European perspective we vaguely know how many institutions there are in Europe, but we do not know

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much about their performance and about their profiles. Multi-dimensional rankings are a new approach. They are user-driven, and they take into account that there is no single objective ranking. And multi-dimensional rankings are able to make visible the diversity of higher-education institutions, which have very different profiles and strengths in different dimensions. So they can go beyond looking at research excellence only and they can counteract the public obsession about so-called "world-class universities", which are comprehensive international research universities only. Multidimensional rankings can demonstrate that there is excellence in other fields, that there is excellence in teaching, there is excellence in lifelong learning, there is excellence in community outreach and other dimensions of the missions of higher education.

Within the context of U-Multirank there could be a specific ranking for open universities, too. Some of the indicators of U-Multirank are easily applicable to this type of institution; the appropriateness of some indicators would have to be discussed, and there is surely a need to develop and identify particular indicators for those kinds of provisions. Up to now open universities and distance-learning programmes have not been very well represented.

Llorenç Valverde
Thank you very much, Gero. Before we go on to the next speaker I would like to ask Gero to wear his other hat as Vice President of IREG, of the Observatory. Could you tell us something about the organization, what it does and how it can, if at all, assist ranking users in their needs in terms of higher education?

Gero Federkeil
Thank you very much. IREG, the abbreviation, originally stood for International Ranking Expert Group, but then the name was changed to IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence. It started as a loose group of people who were doing rankings and people who were doing research on rankings or were, in one way or another, observers of rankings. From that it turned into a membership organisation. The members are institutions that are producing rankings, like the CHE, a number of individual universities that are interested in issues related to ranking, and public institutions, such as the Dutch Inspectorate of Higher Education, which is a public state authority. The major aim of IREG is to stimulate discussion and debate on rankings, enhance the knowledge about rankings and, in the end, contribute to the enhancement of the quality of rankings.

In this context I would like to mention one initiative that is on its way now. In 2006, the IREG passed the so-called Berlin Principles on university rankings. They were the first attempt to formulate basic principles of good ranking practice. They were not very operational but they had some impact on rankings. At the moment the IREG is developing a concept for a quality audit of rankings. We developed a concept and a set of criteria which were launched at a UNESCO conference back in May this year. At the moment we are developing the concept for the audit procedure, which will follow more or less the established accreditation processes in higher education. The audit will be voluntary of course, but we hope that the first volunteers will start this exercise in 2012. I believe this instrument will be important for the users of rankings. Rankings want to create transparency about higher education, but we need more transparency about the rankings themselves, too. And the audit will be an instrument that will help users of rankings to identify high-quality, trustworthy rankings.

Academic rankings
New developments

Endika Bengoetxea
(Policy Officer, Directorate-General of Education and Culture, European Commission)

Endika Bengoetxea works in DG Education and Culture at the European Commission since March 2009 after more than 13 years as professor at the University of the Basque Country in Spain. Since coming to the Commission he has worked in Unit C1 on higher education policy and Erasmus programme management tasks. He currently is responsible for the coordination of Erasmus centralised actions and the EACEA, the Erasmus University Charter, Erasmus Country Desk Officer for the UK, and in policy works notably on third cycle policy, quality assurance and transparency tools.
Dr. Bengoetxea has a BSc in Computer Science from the universities of the Basque Country (ES) and Brighton (England), an MSc in medical imaging from the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), and a PhD in Image and Signal Processing from Télécom Paris in France.
He has worked as professor at the Computer Engineering Faculty in San Sebastian (University of the Basque Country) from 1996 to 2009. Being a former Erasmus student in 1993/94 in the UK, Dr. Bengoetxea had several management positions in the University of the Basque Country related to international relations. From 2001 to 2009 he has also been academic expert in DG EAC and DG INFSO programmes such as Leonardo, Erasmus, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, FP6 and FP7.

Thank you very much. First of all, I would like to thank the UOC very much for their invitation and for their excellent welcome.

I am going to talk to you about the policy we have in the European Commission about rankings. Although I am from the Directorate-General of Education and Culture, obviously we work with rankings, like our colleagues from the Directorate-General of Research. It is a topic that touches many different aspects. We have been working on this initiative of the ranking for a long time already. We began back in 2009, when we launched a feasibility study about doing another type of ranking, using another methodology. Gero will explain afterwards what was done within the framework of a contract with the European Commission.

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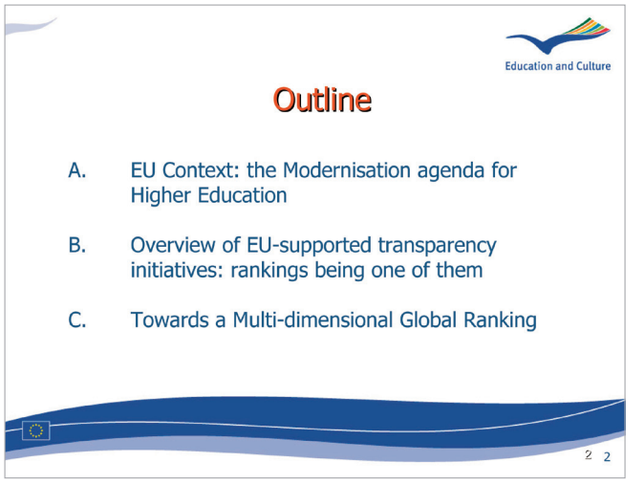

My intention is first to explain to you the policy background, what we really want to achieve with this initiative, why it's so different, and why we consider it more special than other ranking systems that exist at the moment. Let me begin by giving a brief outline of the EU context. I have to say that this seminar came at a very good moment because two days ago in the European Commission we adopted a communication about the modernisation of higher education. Obviously we discussed the impact of rankings in that communication, but we also discussed the future and what we should do in the future in several areas. The communication is a policy document that looks forward to 2020. The document gives a prominent role to transparency tools and I will also focus on this area.

Rankings are one of the transparency tools for us. I am also going to talk about other transparency initiatives we are working on in parallel, and more specifically about our initiative for the multidimensional global ranking. Very briefly, regarding the main political background, the main policy reference is the Europe 2020 Strategy. In 2010 we defined what would be the main political lines of action and objectives for 2020. This is a general framework touching the most important aspects of Europe. It is not only about education, of course, but both higher education and research are much higher up the agenda than they were in the previous ten-year period. Basically the new political agenda is for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Once again we want to achieve an economy based on knowledge and innovation, which obviously means higher education is of the utmost importance. Universities are very, very important.
How do we develop these general statements? Well, we have published the so-called "flagship initiatives". These seven flagship initiatives deal with all the different objectives. Three of them specifically deal with higher education and the role of universities in society.

The first is Youth on the Move. It looks at the mobility and employability of young people. This ties in with rankings because we believe rankings could also contribute to improving people's mobility.

The second is an agenda for new skills and jobs. This initiative does not mention rankings specifically, but it does deal with anticipating the skills that will be needed for the future, for the jobs in 2020.

And the third is Innovation Union, which is related to innovation strategy and how to put good ideas into practice in the market. In this initiative there is a clear commitment to create a multidimensional global ranking because we understand we need transparency to understand what we are good at and to have the necessary information to act in the form of strategic decisions.

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Nevertheless, our main message is that both higher education and research are much higher on the political agenda than they were in the previous decade. Now there is a common consensus among all politicians, all governments, all stakeholders, that it is essential to focus our political efforts on higher education and research to make sure universities can truly fulfil their role.

Focusing more on the transparency aspect, one of the main concerns at the moment for us is global competition. We also have budget constraints, and this is greatly affecting universities. Universities face many challenges, but I would like to focus your attention on two of them: the need to modernize and the need to diversify their strengths. We cannot aspire for universities to continue a race to be the first in everything. For a while there was a tendency to think that universities could invest in absolutely all areas to become the best in everything. But we do not have the resources to be the best at everything. This has been, and still is, a major focus in the area of university research. The proof is that most of the rankings focus on research. In the European Commission we believe that we have to focus also on other areas, on other missions. Institutions can be excellent at other missions, even when they don't excel so much in research. We must recognize this and both society and policymakers must also be aware of this.

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It is important to underline the need to focus on citizens and other users of these transparency tools, such as target groups that might be interested in how universities are performing in various missions. For this we need to create new tools for providing transparency to society as a whole, but also to policymakers and university managers, on how universities are working and how they can contribute to society's objectives. We believe transparency is essential, and we are working very hard on developing transparency tools to improve transparency in the activities universities undertake in order to fulfil their missions.

Let me offer an example of why we think it's important. Greater transparency will, for instance, help both teachers and researchers to make an informed choice on an institution when applying for a job, but also for students to choose where to study. Obviously I am talking about transparency in a global sense, where rankings are one more integral part, just one type of transparency tool. But also we are thinking about university managers, who often don't actually know in which aspects their institutions are really strong. Similarly, policymakers also need to know in which aspects they perform best. Even for those aspects where they are not strong on their own, if these aspects are identified they could try to form a partnership rather than continuously competing again against each other without being able to reach their benchmarks.

In the communication about the modernisation agenda adopted in September 2010, Ms Vassiliou, our Commissioner for Education and Culture, presented the Commission's main lines of action to reach the objectives of this new agenda. The first line of action is related to the need for more graduates in Europe. I will not talk about this because this is not the topic of the presentation, but it does address topics such as quality, relevance and employability. We need to improve the quality and also the relevance of how the institution is performing, and also employability. Employability for us is a vital aspect, just as important as transparency if not more, and we are convinced that higher education must improve its contribution to economic recovery and long-term growth. This is going to be the reference for us in higher education policy until 2020.

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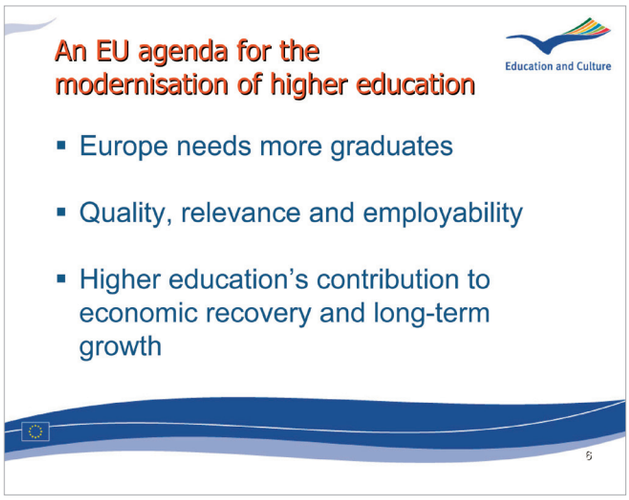

As for the key policy messages regarding diversification of missions, we need more opportunities for studying abroad and for international co-operation, so we must also focus on how well institutions perform at an international level. We need to strengthen education, research and business links, and not just focus on research. We need also to work more on governance, providing governance models to enhance transparency. This is what we are going to work on. For this we need evidenced-base policy, but we also need to know what the state of play is and how we are performing. This is what the message basically is.

As I have already said, we are working on several transparency initiatives, of which rankings are just one. Very briefly I would like to mention other transparency initiatives that are linked to our rankings initiative. In a way they are complementary to each other. The first one is a European data-collection project launched by our colleagues from the Directorate-General of Research. Since we would need data to produce a ranking, the project tried to obtain information from different countries – with a particular focus on European countries – on different issues that might afterwards be useful for policymakers and also for us, for the ranking project. You can imagine that there are all sorts of indicators for education, for internationalisation, about the teaching staff, etc. It's a very broad project, and obviously it was carried out in cooperation with the national statistical

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offices because much of the information was not provided by the institutions themselves. We need to obtain this information also from other sources. And we have been working with national statistical offices because sometimes they were measuring concrete aspects, but they were not doing it in a comparable way. So it was a study to try to analyze the state of play and also provide guidelines for how to improve the situation.

Another initiative is the assessment of higher-education learning outcomes. This is not a project from the Commission but from the OECD, called the AHELO Project. In this project they are developing methodologies for assessing learning outcomes and how they are being applied. We think that this could link well with the ranking initiative in the future because they might come up with concrete indicators to evaluate how universities are applying the learning outcomes and we could use them to measure how they are succeeding in doing so. It is a global, OECD project so these indicators are likely to be used at a global level, not just for European institutions. The European Data Collection Project obviously is more focused on the specificities of Europe, but this project is more global.

The third initiative is the mapping of the diversity of university profiles. I'm sure that Gero will talk about this particular project as well, but basically this tool is about how to profile institutions. The aim is to have a classification of different types of institutions, and this is, for us, a basis for the ranking as well. We cannot compare institutions that have completely different missions. We cannot just look at one research indicator knowing that maybe one institution doesn't have the mission of research, for instance. So there is a lot of work done with this in the framework of a European project, but it is also linked with what Gero and the colleagues in the consortium have been doing, so I guess he will explain this.

For us, the quality assurance system is vital. There are a lot of misuses of rankings, although we understand that is also because we need to strengthen the quality-assurance system more. A lot of work is done by quality-assurance agencies all over the world. Even at the European level, we have different quality-assurance agencies evaluating the quality and accrediting or evaluating the different degrees or the different tasks performed by universities. And we think that we need to improve the visibility of their work and improve how they retransmit this information, because this will also avoid the misuse of the rankings. People tend to go to rankings because it's easy, because it's just one list. But the way they interpret the list is not the way in which it was conceived. So we believe we need to work together. We are making a lot of effort to work on this.

Finally, one more of the transparency initiatives is the ranking initiative and refers to the feasibility study. We launched a feasibility study – carried out by the CHERPA Consortium – and the idea was to test a new

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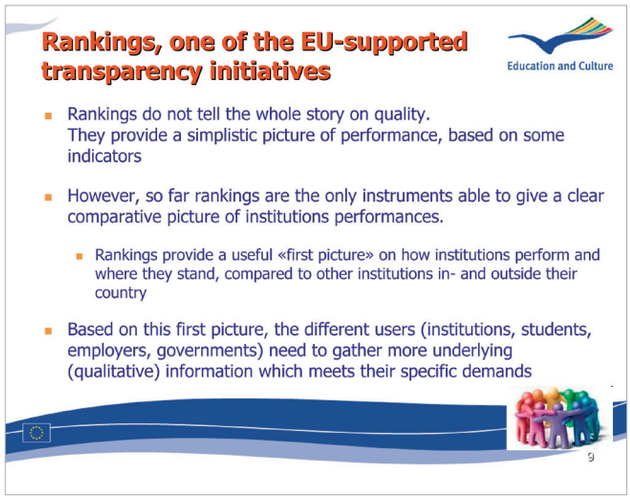
methodology for a multidimensional global ranking. But I reiterate that rankings are just one of many different transparency tools. And we are very much aware that rankings don't tell the whole story about quality. They provide a very simplistic, very limited picture of performance. But rankings are the only instruments that we have so far to compare the performance of institutions. However, rankings exist, and people are using them to make decisions, so we decided we must also work in this area.



We have to understand, though, that rankings provide a useful first picture of what the state of play is. When we talk about users of rankings we are talking about students, teachers, researchers, policymakers, university management and all types of users interested in having a look at the state of play and seeing how universities are performing in any given aspect. We believe rankings can provide only a general picture. Those who want more detail should use another tool. This is the philosophy with which we are working on our ranking initiative.

And what exactly are we doing? Well, we analysed existing rankings and realised they had some shortcomings. That's why we decided to go for something new. Why? Well, every ranking has been designed with a different purpose, and that's why they measure the different aspects in a different way. And that's why they come with differences. We must realise that there is no such thing as an objective ranking. Based on this premise, we need to see what exactly we want to evaluate and how exactly to proceed.

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What are the main shortcomings? The previous speakers in the welcome session already mentioned quite a few of them. But basically our main concern is that rankings focus on research, which is just one of the missions of universities – a very important one, but just one of many. We are also concerned that the indicators mainly focus on the hard sciences. We forget that they don't really serve to properly measure performance in other important areas, such as humanities or social sciences, which we need to take into account. We also forget that the rankings often don't consider other missions such as teaching quality or innovation capacity, which are also very important.

As an example, I would like to refer to the initial slides about political priorities. Firstly, internationalisation is very important in Europe, and we have no rankings analysing how international universities perform, at least focusing on this aspect. Another important area is community outreach, especially now that we are investing so much in higher education, and we know that in order for public money to be invested in education it is also important for citizens to know how the universities are contributing to their society.

The focus of existing rankings is mainly on entire institutions and not on specific programmes or disciplines. This is also a major shortcoming. A user of a ranking might be interested in a specific discipline or mission, but can usually only see a ranking of institutions, usually as a league table. A league table is a closed table with a specific item in first, second and third place. But maybe they take into consideration several other aspects that our user is really not so interested in. Maybe if the table could not take into account some of the aspects that are being measured then the ranking would be completely different, and from our experience we know that this would be the case in practically all existing rankings.

So basically, from our perspective, the question that we were asking is: are existing rankings useful for strategic decision-making? And for us the answer is no. And we have several examples of how rankings measure very unique aspects. Maybe one of the most well-known is the number of teachers that have obtained a Nobel Prize, or something similar. There are even rankings measuring the number of students that have been awarded a Nobel Prize, even for those who are no longer alive. How is this important when you choose a university or define a strategy? This is basically the concern that we have and that's why we decided to go forward and try to develop something new.

And what is the idea? Well, we would like to have a ranking tool that is multidimensional, focusing on other dimensions apart from research. More specifically, we are thinking of very different dimensions, but obviously we wanted to consider teaching quality and internationalisation, as I have already explained. I will let Gero explain what they have been doing in that context in the five dimensions in which they have worked. We also wanted this to be user-driven. "User-driven" is related to each person that will have different interests, so the idea is that each person can choose which aspects he or she is interested in. Basically it's a sort of tool for creating tables and not a closed ranking or closed league table like those that currently exist.

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Obviously we want to focus our attention at the institutional level, but also at the disciplinary level. The tool must be independent. At the moment the European Commission is funding the development and the feasibility study. But we are convinced that if this goes forward it must be run by an independent organization. It must not be run by governments or universities. And it must be global, not just for Europe.

So with this idea in mind, a feasibility study was launched. I underline this feasibility study aspect because it was just a study to know if it is possible to have such a tool following these ideas. From May 2009 to practically July 2011 there was a contract that was run by a consortium and Gero is part of the consortium. He will explain exactly what they have been doing. But I leave this for Gero.

Thank you very much.

Online universities
What parameters for ranking?

Karsten Krueger
(Project Manager, Fundación CYD)

He holds a Ph.D. in sociology at the Free University of Berlin. Since 1985, he has been working in Catalonia in Catalonia, as a senior researcher at the Foundation CIREM, scientific coordinator of European projects for the Barcelona University and the University Rovira i Virgili. It has also been project manager for the European CEDEFOP. He currently works as project manager for the CYD Foundation dealing with the scientific coordination of the "Ranking of Spanish Universities."

He has worked as professor at the Computer Engineering Faculty in San Sebastian (University of the Basque Country) from 1996 to 2009. Being a former Erasmus student in 1993/94 in the UK, Dr. Bengoetxea had several management positions in the University of the Basque Country related to international relations. From 2001 to 2009 he has also been academic expert in DG EAC and DG INFSO programmes such as Leonardo, Erasmus, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, FP6 and FP7.

Introduction
Rankings: what they compare and for whom
Problems with existing rankings
General principles of the FCYD ranking
Two relevant methodological aspects of the FCYD Ranking
e-Learning in the FCYD ranking

Introduction

I would like to thank the UOC for the opportunity it has given us to present our proposed ranking of Spanish universities on behalf of the FCYD. For several years now the FCYD has been working to produce a ranking of Spanish universities. Indeed, since 2008 our annual report, *Informe CYD – La contribución de las universidades españolas al desarrollo*, has included a section on university rankings. In 2010, this idea materialised in a project to promote a ranking, or rather a system of indicators of the Spanish university system. To this end, the FCYD has established a cooperative relationship with the Centre of Higher Education (CHE), whose ranking of German universities we believe is a good example.

I shall now briefly present the methodology of our system of indicators of quality in universities. The methodology is still at the development phase and we are still testing its feasibility. This presentation is divided into four parts:

- First, I will focus on the usefulness of the rankings, in other words, what their purpose is and what they compare.
- Second, I will briefly discuss the problems with existing rankings. Since this has already been discussed in previous sessions, I shall only outline the main criticisms.
- Third, I shall explain the concept of our ranking by explaining the principles that steered our methodology and suggesting who might use our ranking.
- Fourth, I shall discuss the two most relevant aspects of our work thus far:
    - Firstly, fields of knowledge have been defined based on the CHE's proposal of not focusing the

Online universities - What parameters for ranking?

by Karsten Krueger

ranking on each university, but rather on specific aspects such as areas of research or areas of study. Since we want to give greater prominence to teaching, we chose to base our ranking around areas of knowledge.

• Secondly, indicators have been defined to measure the quality of the different areas of knowledge of Spanish universities.

I shall end this presentation by answering the question as to how our ranking includes aspects of distance learning and e-learning while making it clear that e-learning has not been included as a separate category in our ranking.

Rankings: what they compare and for whom

Rankings are based on social and economic indicators. Social indicators have been used as tools for analysis in a branch of social science that goes back to the 1960s. Education indicators existed even earlier, but social indicators took off in the 1960s, then fell out of favour before returning to the fore in the 1990s. From the beginning, both social and education indicators have been used as tools to assess the effectiveness of political programmes. The other origin of rankings is in benchmarking, which is a business methodology that involves defining key indicators to compare a company's situation with that of its competitors so it can improve its performance in its weaker areas.

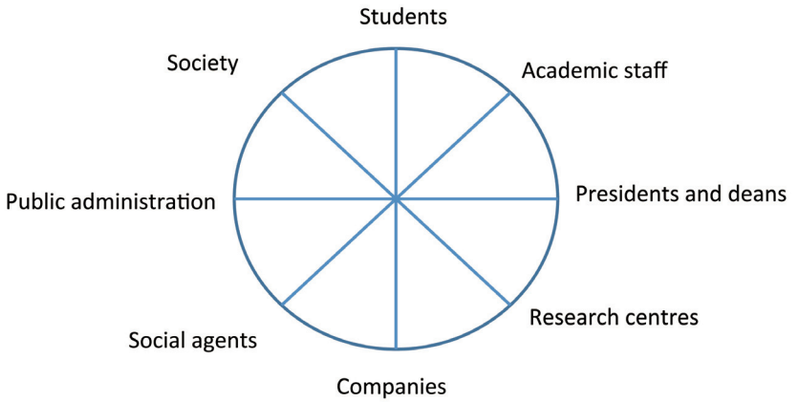
There are two fundamental issues for both social indicators and benchmarking indicators, and therefore also for rankings:

► For whom are the indicators produced?

► What do the indicators compare?

If we look at the rankings with which we are concerned at this conference, that is, the university rankings, we have every reason to ask for whom the rankings are produced. We all know that universities are very complex organisations in which the interests of a wide variety of groups are at stake. The figure below illustrates the range of groups with an interest in well-functioning universities. But each group has its own definition of what constitutes a well-functioning university.

The students' interest in good teaching does not necessarily coincide with how businesses understand good higher education. Neither does it necessarily coincide with the interests of academic staff, who are more interested in scientific research than in teaching.



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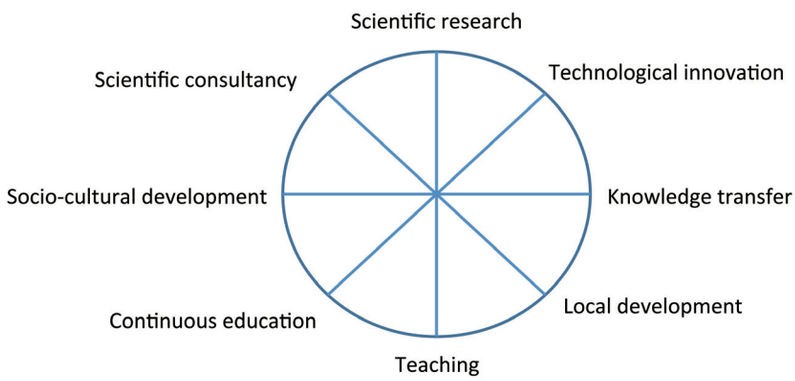
In other words, each group has a different vision of what a university should do. If we think of these groups as customers, as is so often done at the moment, they all expect different services from the university, such as education (initial or continuing), scientific research, technological innovation, knowledge transfer, scientific advice and contributions to economic and sociocultural development.



In other words, the indicators used for ranking will probably change depending on how the group of users of that ranking is defined.

We must also bear in mind that universities are very complex organisations. Between an engineering faculty and a humanities faculty there are many differences in the way teaching and research is conducted and in their relationships with society and the economic sector. We can also assume that training somebody for scientific work in academia is different from training somebody to work in public administration or the private sector. These are just examples that challenge the idea of the university being the unit of comparison. There are other types of units that could be subject to a ranking, such as faculties, departments and research centres. As I shall explain later, we propose that fields of knowledge be used as the reference point.

Problems with existing rankings

Existing university rankings are renowned for their diversity. Some rankings are by fields of knowledge. Some rankings are produced by private organisations (especially the press) while others are published by public bodies or public-private partnerships. There is also a wide range of intended users. Some are produced for students (Times Higher Education Ranking and CHE Ranking), others are for politicians (Shanghai Ranking), and others are for academia (Leiden Ranking and SCImago). Depending on these factors, the dimensions covered by the rankings vary: teaching and learning, research, internationalisation, knowledge transfer, social impact, and others.

The criticisms of many rankings are also widely known. Here I present a summary of some of those criticisms, without entering into a detailed discussion:

► Many rankings, especially global rankings, compare universities without taking into account their specific profiles or their academic fields. Not all universities are research universities. Rather, many put more emphasis on the quality of their teaching.

► The way they are oriented towards large, international research universities tends to be to the detriment of small universities. This also happens with the rankings of some national excellence initiatives.

► Often it is not entirely clear what user groups a ranking is aimed at.

► Many rankings, especially those in which academic activity is most important, tend to favour the “hard” sciences, at the expense of the “soft” sciences. For example, there are still problems with properly accounting for publications in the form of books, which are very important in some fields of social science and humanities. In some academic fields it also remains a problem that publishing in the vernacular is more important than

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publishing in the lingua franca of science, which is English.
► Most rankings usually use synthetic indicators without providing a good explanation of the methodology used for weighting the different indicators or the reasons for creating the indicators synthetically. But only composite indicators make it possible to produce league tables in which a university occupies the top spot.
► Such tables usually exaggerate small differences, since ultimately a university's position in the table is usually more important than the more detailed information that could be extracted from the table.

General principles of the FCYD ranking
Taking the above criticisms into account, the FCYD developed a set of principles to govern the design of its methodology. Before looking at those principles in detail, I would like to add that we also aim to follow the good practice guidelines set out in the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions* published by the International Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG), which was also mentioned in a previous session. I would also like to mention that we have sought the cooperation of the CHE, which we believed was a good example to follow, since it has already been ranking German universities for 15 years. It is therefore no coincidence that the FCYD's and the CHE's ranking methodologies have so much in common. The FCYD ranking prioritises teaching and learning, but without neglecting research, given that the relationship between teaching and research remains one of the features of universities.

Although this focus on teaching and learning suggests that students will be one of the main user groups, even within this group there is a variety of preferences for certain indicators over others. This is all the more relevant if we take into account other users interested in a comparative assessment of the education quality of universities, such as businesses, politicians, university management and stakeholders. We therefore focused on a multidimensional ranking, rather than producing composite indicators. Our ranking leaves the users to decide how relevance each indicator is.

This methodology means our ranking will not be in the form of a table with one university at the top, one in second place, one in third, and so on and so forth. To make the ranking easier to see we will use performance groups or clusters.

Nevertheless, before producing the ranking we must establish whether it will actually be useful for anything or anyone. We do believe that a ranking based on reliable and verifiable indicators of the quality of university teaching and learning serves to:
► help students decide where to study;
► help scholars analyse the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in their institution and to use the ranking as an indicator of prestige;
► provide businesses with a source of information on job applicants and on the research capacity of the universities' scientific fields;
► provide universities with more information to analyse their strengths and weaknesses;
► provide ministries and universities with an additional reference for objective agreements;
► provide all stakeholders with tools to assess higher-education policies and acquire a picture of the institutional diversity.

Despite the criticisms expressed in previous sessions, the rankings, or rather the system of indicators of university quality, can be valuable tools in the decision-making processes. They should not be the only tool, and probably not even the most important. Nevertheless, a well-designed, transparent ranking could be very useful in helping the stakeholders listed above to make decisions.

Two relevant methodological aspects of the FCYD Ranking
One of the first decisions taken was that the unit of analysis will not be the university, faculty or department, but rather the field of knowledge, which is composed of study programmes, since our ranking focuses on the

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educational mission of higher-education institutions.

One of our first tasks, therefore, was to create a list of fields of knowledge using the **undergraduate degrees** that currently exist in the Spanish higher-education system. This includes the first-cycle and second-cycle degrees under the old system and the new undergraduate degrees that are adapted to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The source used to acquire this information was the website of the Education Ministry's Register of Universities, Institutions and Qualifications (RUCT). This should make it possible to establish a link between the Education Ministry's database, which has a long list of fields of knowledge, and the databases used in bibliometric analyses.

By way of example, the following tables show the records for economics in the social science and law branch and computer science in the architecture and engineering branch.

Social science and law: Economics	
Undergraduate degree (Grado)	Economic Science; Economics; Financial and Actuarial Economics; Economics with Journalism; Economics and Finance; Economics and International Business Finance; Finance and Accounting; Finance and Insurance; Finance, Banking and Insurance; Tax and Public Administration
Double degree	Law & Economics; Law & Finance; Law & Finance and Accounting; Economics & Law
Undergraduate degree (Licenciatura)	Actuarial and Financial Science (second-cycle only); Economics (honours degree); Economics (second-cycle)

Architecture & Engineering: Computer Science	
Undergraduate degree (Grado)	Computer Science and Services / Computer Engineering / Software Engineering / Information Technology / Information Systems / Computer Science / Computer Science and Computer Engineering / Computer Science and Software Engineering / Computer Science and Information Technology / Management Information Systems / Computer Services and Applications / Computer Systems / Computer Software / Computer Science in Software Engineering / Computer Science in Information Technology / Computer Science in Software Engineering / Computer Science in Information Systems / Computer Science in Information Systems and Technology / Computer Science in Information Technology
Double degree	Computer Science & Business Administration / Computer Science & Business Management and Entrepreneurship / Computer Science & Mathematics
Former courses	Diplomas: Computer Science / Computer Science [Management section] / Computer Science [Systems section] // Short-cycle degrees: Computer Management / Computer Systems / / Ordinary degrees: Computer Science / / Honours degrees: Computer Science / Computer Science (second-cycle)

In all, 71 fields of knowledge have been defined. In the third stage, we analyse the correlations between our list of fields of knowledge and the Education Ministry's list of branches and fields of knowledge to ensure that the databases of the universities, the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) and the Education Ministry were compatible. We also checked the correlation between our list of areas and the academic fields listed in bibliographical databases such as Scopus to ensure our list will be compatible with bibliometric analysis.

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We do not intend to apply our methodology to all 71 fields of knowledge. Instead, by applying the criteria that at least 15 universities must offer a programme in a branch and that the total number of places offered by all universities must be at least 1,500, we have included only 37 universities.

Table 2: Fields of knowledge by branch of knowledge according to the CYD ranking

	Humanities & Arts		Social sciences		Experimental sciences		Health sciences		Architecture & Engineering
	17 Fields		15 Fields		11 Fields		14 Fields		14 Fields
1	Anthropology	1	Political Science		Biology & Biotechnology	1	Animal Science	1	Aerospace Engineering
2	Archaeology	2	Communication		Biochemistry	2	Human Biology	2	Architecture
3	Fine Art	3	Criminology		Food Science & Technology	3	Sport	3	Construction
4	Culture	4	Law		Environmental Science	4	Nursing	4	Food, Agriculture and Forestry
5	Design	5	Documentation		Marine Science	5	Pharmacy	5	Energy
6	Philosophy	6	Economics		Statistics	6	Physiotherapy	6	
7	Geography	7	Education		Physics	7	Speech Therapy	7	Computer Science
8	History	8	Social Education		Geology	8	Nutrition	8	Industrial Organisation
9	Humanities	9	Business Studies		Mathematics	9	Human Medicine	9	Industrial Design
10	Classical Languages		Journalism		Chemistry		Dentistry	10	Electronics
11	Spanish		Advertising		Others		Optics	11	Industrial Engineering
12	Iberian Languages		Industrial Relations				Psychology	12	Chemistry
13	European Languages		Sociology				Podiatry	13	Naval and Marine Engineering
14	English		Social Work				Occupational Therapy	14	Others
15	Non-European Languages		Others						
16	Translation								
17	Others								
TOTAL FIELDS 71									FIELDS INCLUDED IN THE RANKING 37

The second important aspect in developing the methodology is to define indicators. Initially we defined nine analytical dimensions we believed were important to evaluate the quality of university teaching. These definitions and indicators are not set in stone and will be continuously reviewed.

(I) Ability to attract students	(II) International academic orientation	(III) Academic performance
(IV) Research quality	(V) Teaching quality	(VI) Infrastructure for learning
(VII) Technology transfer	(VIII) Labour market	(IX) Overall assessment

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However, all indicator-based assessments should begin with a working hypothesis, stating what one of various indicators show about the quality of what is being studied. The analytical dimensions should be based on general hypotheses that can provide information on the education quality of study programmes.

The table below shows the working hypothesis for each of the analytical dimensions. Time constraints do not allow me to discuss these hypotheses in greater detail.

Analytical dimensions and working hypotheses
I) Ability to attract students
A higher-quality study program attracts students from other regions and countries.
II) International academic orientation
Study programmes that are of a higher academic quality attract lecturers from other countries.
III) Academic performance
A high-quality study programme results in good student performance in terms of their years of study and the drop-out rate.
IV) Research quality
Good-quality research in a field of knowledge is usually accompanied by good quality study programmes in the same field of knowledge.
V) Teaching quality
Adequate investment of resources is needed to achieve good-quality study programmes.
As the main customers of universities, students (and alumni) are able to assess the quality of study programmes.
VI) Infrastructure for learning
Faculties in universities must have adequate learning infrastructure to achieve good-quality study programmes.
VII) Technology transfer
Modern higher education requires cooperation with business and other organisations both in education (internships) and research (joint projects) and consultancy.
VIII) Labour market
A good job-placement rate for university graduates and a good chance of being given good positions in the medium and long term are evidence of the good quality of a study programme.
IX) Overall assessment
The quality of a study programme is reflected in the opinions of students, alumni and lecturers.

For each dimension we have defined a series of indicators, as shown in the appendix. At the present stage of the methodological development we have defined 64 indicators for the nine dimensions, which depend on data we hope to obtain from university databases and surveys completed by students, lecturers and alumni. There will also be a bibliometric analysis.

Clearly, then, our ranking relies upon the cooperation of universities. We need them to provide the statistical data from their databases on the one hand, and access to students, lecturers and alumni on the other. One of our next steps, therefore, is to check whether universities actually have the necessary data for a breakdown of the course programmes.

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E-learning in the FCYD ranking

I will end this brief presentation of our proposed ranking by discussing whether it covers e-learning. In my introduction I mentioned that we did not treat e-learning as a separate dimension when we defined our indicators. However, the "infrastructure" dimension takes into account the availability of ICT-based tools. For the moment we only cover the availability of computers, but we could open up this category to other aspects of e-learning such as the availability of electronic material, virtual learning spaces, etc. But I have to admit that at the moment this is not one of our priorities in the development of our ranking, which obviously has focused on face-to-face teaching.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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Michael Jacobs
(Project Manager/Statistician, Business Education, The Financial Times)

Michael Jacobs has been a Statistician at the Financial Times, London, since 2008. He is primarily responsible for seven international business school rankings, published annually. Before joining the FT, Michael Jacobs worked in the Government Statistical Service in the United Kingdom, mainly at the Office for National Statistics and HM Treasury. He holds a degree in Mathematics from the University of Manchester.

Thank you very much for your kind introduction. Just one small clarification: I'm not actually a professor, although I wish that I was. So anyway, I'm Michael Jacobs. I'm the statistician who works at the *Financial Times* and my main responsibilities are for the business school rankings. Today I'm going to talk to you a little bit about the rankings, the data we collect, the variables that we assess, and I'm also going to give you a bit of information about the directory of online MBA programmes that we have, and give a brief explanation of why we don't currently rank those programmes at the moment.

So, to begin with, the *FT* currently produces six annual rankings of business education programmes. We do rankings of programmes, not institutions. The biggest of those is the MBA ranking. Currently there are 100 schools in the 2011 ranking, although around 160 schools actually participate and try to get into the top 100. That ranking has actually been running since 1999, so we now have 13 years of continuous and comparable data on participating schools. In addition to the ranking of MBA programmes, we also rank executive MBA's, masters in management, and masters in finance programmes. We also rank some shorter executive education programmes, which are aimed at middle-level and senior managers. Finally, we have a composite ranking, which is a combination of all of the different rankings that we do for European schools.

The FT produces six international business school rankings annually:

1. **MBA**
2. **Executive MBA**
3. **Masters in Management**
4. **Masters in Finance**
5. **Executive Education**
6. **European Business Schools**

- **Rankings are based on surveys of schools and alumni**
- **Schools must meet criteria to participate**
- **The FT surveys circa 60,000 graduates from more than 300 schools per annum**

FT FINANCIAL TIMES Business School Rankings

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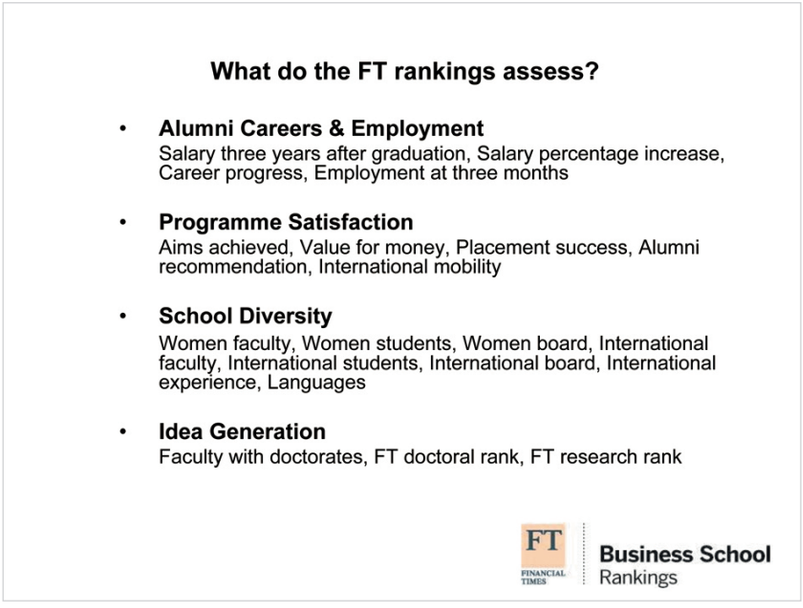
So, the rankings themselves are based on an online survey of participating schools and their alumni. We survey alumni three years after graduation to get a better sense of how their degree has helped them in terms of their professional development. As I mentioned, we have six rankings and so we're running six separate surveys of alumni and schools. So in a typical year we are in touch with 300 schools around the world and we survey close to 60,000 graduates. In order to take part in our ranking, each school must meet some quite strict criteria. First of all they need to be accredited by one of two international accreditation bodies. The first is the AACSB, which is the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, which is an American-based organisation, although it does accredit schools internationally. The second is the EFMD, which is the European Foundation for Management Development. In addition to accreditation, schools need to have been running their nominated programme for at least five years and they must have at least 30 students on their programme in each of those five years, largely for statistical reasons. When we come to survey the alumni we need to have a representative sample.

So moving on to what we actually include in our rankings, there are four main groupings. We have alumni career and employment; the satisfaction of the alumni with the programme; the diversity of the school in terms of women students, within faculty; and what we call "idea generation", i.e. to what extent the school is involved in pushing forward the subject areas and so on.



Let me start with the alumni careers and employment information. We focus quite heavily on this, mainly because whenever we speak to business school graduates and we ask them about their reasons for studying, they always tell us one of two things, which are that they wanted to get a better job and they wanted more money. Exactly. So as part of the alumni survey we ask the graduates about the job they currently have and how much money they earn. And using that information we calculate an average salary three years after graduation, where available. So for the MBA and EMBA programmes we also compare their salary before the programme to what they are earning now, to get a sense of to what extent that has actually changed. We attempt to measure their career progress as well, based on their job title and the size of the company they are currently working in, just to get a sense of whether they have been promoted or moved to a bigger company, and so on. Finally, we ask schools to give us information on the most recent graduating class and how many of those graduates managed to find a job within three months of graduation. So that's the careers and employment section.

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In terms of programme satisfaction, we ask the graduates to tell us about – as I mentioned – why they studied the programme, but we also ask them, "Did studying the programme help you to achieve that reason?" So, "Did you have more money? Did you get a better job? Did you improve your knowledge of management?", and so on. Value for money is obviously quite an important consideration, as most of these programmes cost upwards of $50,000 or more, depending on where you go. So we create a measure based on, first of all, the salary, but also the actual cost as well as the length of the programme, to allow for the opportunity costs in actually giving up your job to go and study. In terms of satisfaction we also ask about career service and we create a placement success measure, so we basically say, "Did you have a career service at your school? Did you use it? And did they help you get a job?" I mean this is another important element of going to business school; it's establishing a network and people helping you to find that next job. We also ask about which business schools these graduates would actually recruit from, to get a sense of the reputation of schools throughout the world, or the value that people actually in the real world place on these schools. Finally, we also measure their mobility in terms of where they were living before their programme. Did they move around the world? Is that something they wanted to do?

Moving on to diversity, when the *FT* first created its ranking of business schools, diversity of students, especially in terms of participation of female students, was flagged up as an issue, a problem. There weren't enough women going to business school. So we currently include a measure of that, partly to encourage participation, or to encourage schools to encourage participation, should I say. We are also looking at international factors, so how many of the students are international, how many of the faculty, just in terms of making it a global programme, bringing different perspectives into the classroom. Finally, we look at the international experience, as well, of the programme, which is based on things like: do students go oversees to study, do they go on an exchange and do they have an overseas internship?

And moving on to the last section, idea generation, we look at, first of all, how many of the faculty have a PhD, to get a sense of their academic grounding and background. We also compute a doctoral rank based on how many PhD graduates a school has each year and whether they go on to teach in one of the top 50 schools, as ranked by us. Finally there's a research rank as well, in which we look at 45 key management journals and other academic journals and look at how many articles faculty members at participating schools have managed to have published in those journals. So a mixture of a bit of everything, I think.

At this point, I might just quickly, if I can, show you a few things that we have online. As well as the rankings, we are starting to think more of the underlying indicators as well and how we can present that information. We have some quite nice tools now online. This is not behind the *FT*'s pay barrier, so you don't have to pay to look at this.

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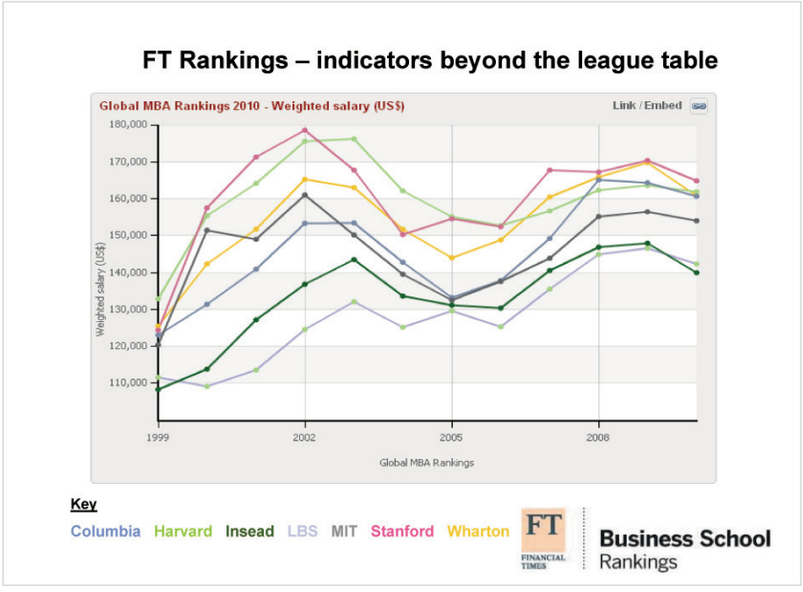

This is business schools but it is not a "business" for the *FT,* it's free for you. So here we have an interactive table of the rankings. You can see whatever you like, you can sort it by country and so on. If you're interested in data and you want to download everything you can actually open this in Excel, but this is not what I wanted to show you. We actually have some charting tools now, which allow people who want to make comparisons between schools to easily look at some of the underlying variables in our ranking and to compare against schools they are interested in. As we are in Barcelona let's try… okay, let's add in a few more. It has recommended a few other schools to me based on my selection. If I scroll down we see basically a comparison of some of the data from our latest ranking for those three schools. As I mentioned we now have data going back to 1999, so you can actually plot that information over time as well. So that's quite a nice time series of the earnings of alumni from those schools. If I select… What's the other one? I'd like to look at employment: how many people found a job within three months, and we see in more recent times that students found it more difficult to find a job, which is hardly surprising, but it highlights the usefulness of the data that we hold, I think.

This is another indicator that falls out of the data we collect from schools. This is the percentage of women students in MBA programmes over the last… –how many years is that? – from 2003-2010. So in the early years –the blue bar here is all of the schools, the red bar is North American schools, and the green bar is European schools – basically we see that the European schools are lagging behind slightly. Although the percentage of participation amongst females is going up, it still has a way to go. We are up to about a third overall, which is, you know, it is what it is.

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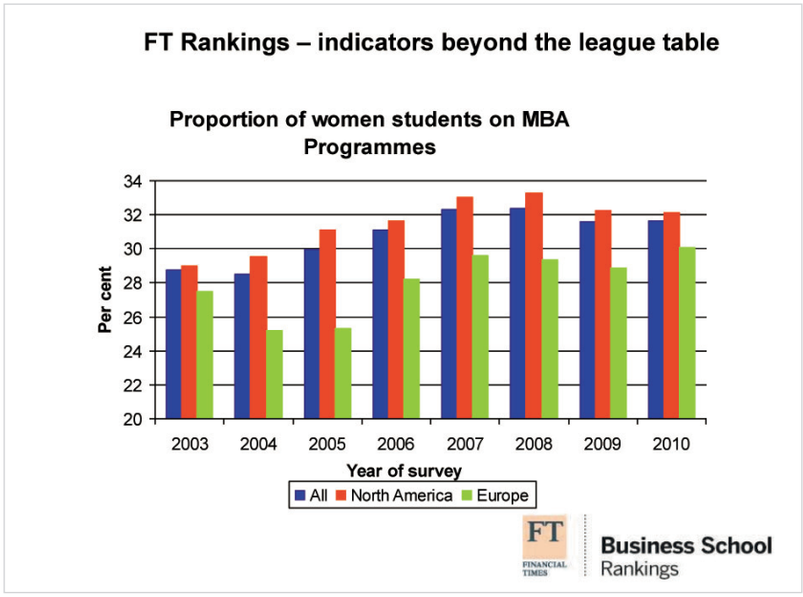
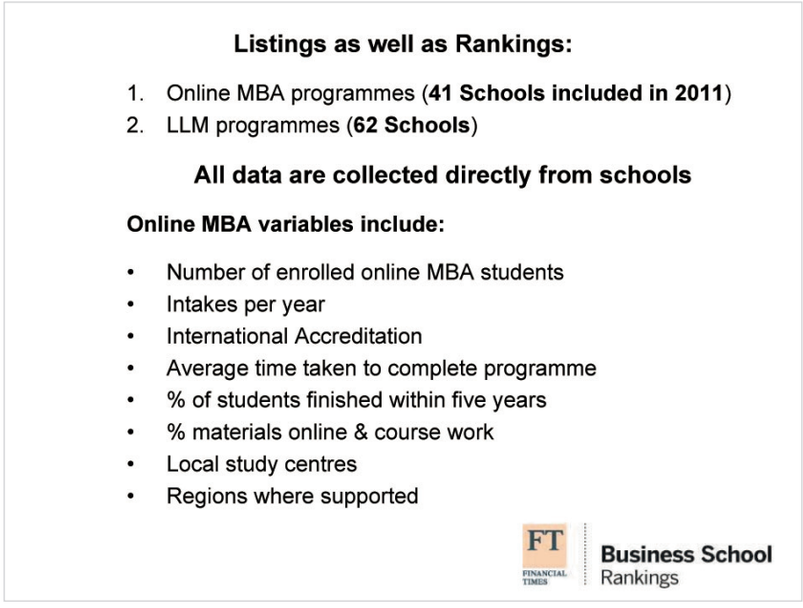


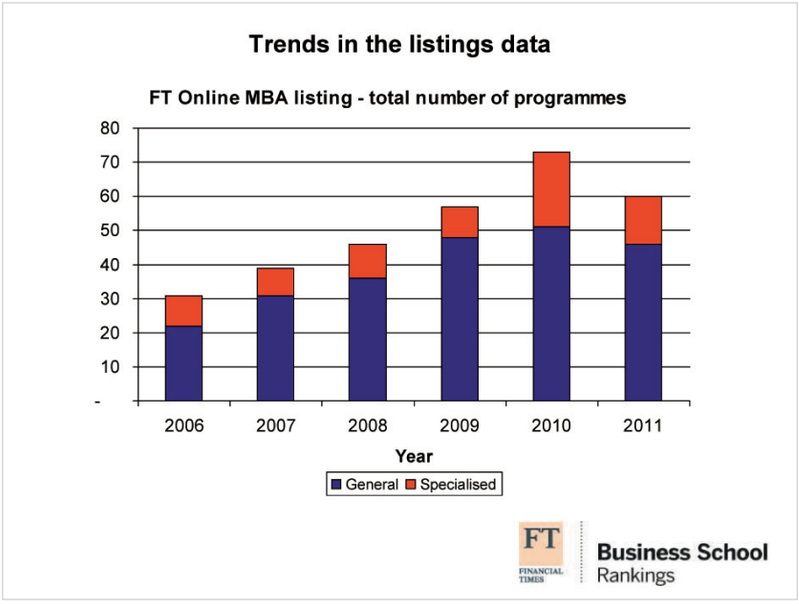
Okay, so in addition to rankings, the *FT* also produces two listings, which are essentially a directory of programmes. One is of online MBA programmes, and we had 41 schools in that listing in 2011. The other one is of LLM programmes, which are law degrees, and we have 62 schools. This is – like I say – simply a directory of schools. And all of the information we collect is coming directly from participating schools. Amongst the information we collect from online MBA programmes we look at the number of students, how international they are, how long it takes them to complete their studies, what percentage of the materials are available online, and whether their examinations are taken online. Do students have to go to study in the local study centre or go to the school to study? So it's a mixture of what type of people do these programmes and how you are going to be assessed and how the materials are made available to you.



So focusing on the online MBA directory, since 2006 we have been gradually increasing the number of programmes. And we've got more specialized MBA programmes as well, so I think it reflects the fact that this

Online universities - What parameters for ranking? *by Michael Jacobs*

is a growing market. This chart simply shows you the number of general specialized programmes that we have in our listing. We did reach 72 in 2010, but that's dropped off now for reasons that aren't clear to me. I think it's definitely a growing market.



So I think, based on the information that we collect, it's clear that these programmes really are genuinely online. More than 80% of the coursework that participants are required to complete is actually done online; 90% of the programmes listed required the participants to actually collaborate with each other online, which is obviously an important part of any programme. In addition, 85% of the materials were made available online. So that makes it much easier to access everything you need. It's all in one place. In fact, for 26 of the programmes in our listing, all of the materials were available online. At the same time, roughly 50% of the programmes still require students to spend time at the campus, which means they are online but not really, I suppose. Also, similar proportions of programmes still require students to go and take their exams. They are not allowed to do it online, which makes sense for security reasons but is not necessarily ideal for somebody who wants to study a programme at an American school from Europe, for example.

So moving on to why we don't actually rank these online MBA programmes: first of all, we have differences in the programme structure. So unlike our MBA programmes, the traditional classroom-based ones, let's say, it's not quite so clearly defined how much time is online. Are these programmes actually similar in their structure? For example, blended learning, where you have a mixture of teaching online and in the classroom, is becoming increasingly common. So there is a blurring between the lines of, "Is this online only, or is it a classroom-based programme? Which is it?" In terms of accreditation, we use accreditation as a way of ensuring that schools have met common standards. Currently there is a lack of programmes with accreditation in our listing, which means that we cannot be sure that these are necessarily comparable or meet a common standard.

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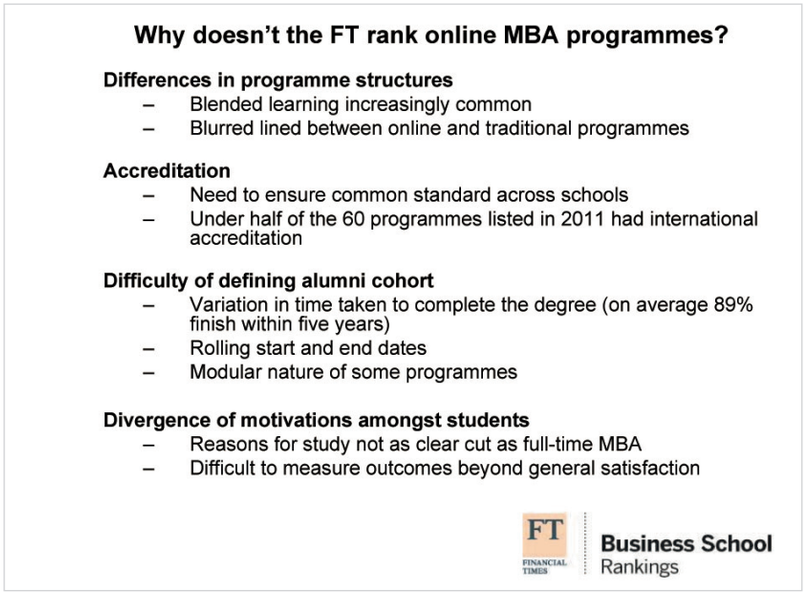

Given the focus that we have on outcomes for alumni, for what we do it is important to define who that alumni cohort is. So given that people are taking varying amounts of time to complete their programme, start and finishing at different times, it is very difficult for us to define who we would actually survey. Also, the modular nature of a lot of online programmes means that people might pick and mix. They might just take one module from one programme. It is not necessarily a continuous MBA programme.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, when we speak to graduates it's all about money and career. I think that would be less the case for people who are studying online. In terms of how we would define what the outcomes are, that needs to be driven by why people are choosing to do those programmes in the first place, which is less clear-cut. Also, it's difficult to measure things – if we were looking at career progression or salaries – given the differences in starting times and end times, it becomes much more difficult. For those reasons we don't currently rank the MBA programmes, we only list them. But hopefully you will have some suggestions on how we might be able to overcome some of these problems.

And at that point I think I will end.

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Sarah Guri-Rosenblit
(Director of International Academic Outreach and Head of Graduate Studies in Education at the Open University of Israel)

Sarah Guri-Rosenblit is the Director of International Academic Outreach and the Head of Graduate Studies in Education at the Open University of Israel. She is a member of the Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) Committee in the Israeli Council for Higher Education. She got her PhD from Stanford University in 1984 in education and political science. Her areas of expertise are focused on comparative research of higher education systems, distance education and e-learning. She has participated in the last decade in many international and national forums on various aspects of higher education. She was selected in 2005/6 as one of the 30 New Century Scholars in the Fulbright Program on: 'Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response'. From 2003 until 2009 she was a member of the Scientific Committee of Europe and North America in the UNESCO Forum of Higher Education, Research and Knowledge. She is currently a member in expert evaluations panels of HESC (Higher Education and Social Change) under the auspices of the European Science Foundation, and the Bellagio Conference Center of the Rockefeller Foundation. Her new book on Digital Technologies in Higher Education: Sweeping Expectations and Actual Effects was published in March 2009 by Nova Science in New York, and a paperback version of this book has been published in December 2010.

Over the last twenty years my field of expertise in research has been comparative higher education, with a special focus on distance education. In the last decade it also dealt with online education, digital technologies, and e-learning, which are quite blurred terminologies. Distance education has existed, at the level of higher education, for over 150 years. Throughout history there were quite problematic relations and tensions between campus-based universities and distance-education providers. In many countries, distance education is still considered as second best, operating on the margins of higher education, or even outside the realm of higher education.

These intricate tensions between campus-based and distance-education institutions are also reflected in the debates today on the ranking tables and online providers. So far, in most leading ranking tables, the online providers are nonexistent, even though some people mentioned earlier in the seminar that they are aware that such provisions exist and they have to be taken into account. I am not accusing the people responsible for the ranking tables for omitting online providers, since the lack of reference to online institutions is partly based on the huge confusion as to what constitutes nowadays online learning or e-learning. This year I published an article in the ***Distance Education*** journal with Begoña Gros, who was until recently the Vice Rector for Innovation and Research at the Open University of Catalonia and is the director of the E-Learning Institute. The article, entitled "E-learning: Confusing Terminology, Research Gaps, and Challenging Tasks", deals, amongst other things, with the problem of how heterogeneous the field of online learning is, and argues that until we fully understand its complexity and its many manifestations, it's very difficult to relate to it in generic terms.

Before I move to the 10 parameters/indicators which seem to be relevant to the ranking of online providers, I will very briefly touch on some points that were already discussed here, but seem to be most relevant to the discussion on ranking tables of online institutions. One of the underlying premises of ranking tables all over the world has been an international orientation. Imma Tubella and Begoña Gros published a book last year

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entitled “Turning Universities Upside Down”. Currently the book has been published in Catalan and Spanish, and in the near future it will also be published in English. The article which I contributed to this book deals with the gradual moving of universities from operating in a national system to functioning in a ***glocal*** landscape, in which they have to be attentive concurrently to local needs and to the requirements of operating in a global environment. Such a change constitutes a huge challenge for higher-education institutions. The movement to an international landscape encourages universities to extend and broaden their missions, and at the same time threatens their stability. If they wish to attract international faculty and international students, they have to redefine their policies accordingly.

One huge dilemma of operating in a global environment relates to the language of instruction. Obviously, if you want international students, you cannot continue teaching only in Catalan, or in Slovakian, or in Russian, or in Hebrew, or in any other language that is restricted to a national jurisdiction. English-speaking countries such as the UK, the United States, Australia and Canada have a notable advantage in the current higher-education market. The language barrier has an impact on the status of universities in ranking tables.

The international ranking tables, which only started in 2004, less than ten years ago, were initially mainly geared at identifying world-class universities, i.e. leading research universities. They also had an impact on the decisions of governments. In some countries, like Germany, it has become a national policy issue to identify world-class universities and allocate them large amounts of money to strengthen their status and enable them to compete with mainly American world-class universities. Such a trend also took place in China, Japan, India and some other countries. So the ranking tables at the beginning, the international ranking tables, were not geared to rank all types of universities, but mainly leading research universities. Now we have many ranking tables that deal with all higher-education institutions.

A second underlying premise, related to the ranking tables, relates to the huge diversity of higher education institutions in any higher education system. In the classification of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States there are currently 34 different categories of higher-education institutions. In the most diverse higher education systems new institutions have emerged in recent decades, including online and e-learning providers. Even among online and e-learning providers there is a huge heterogeneity. It is quite clear why it is so difficult today to create comprehensive ranking tables that compare all of the diverse institutions on the basis of the same indicators.

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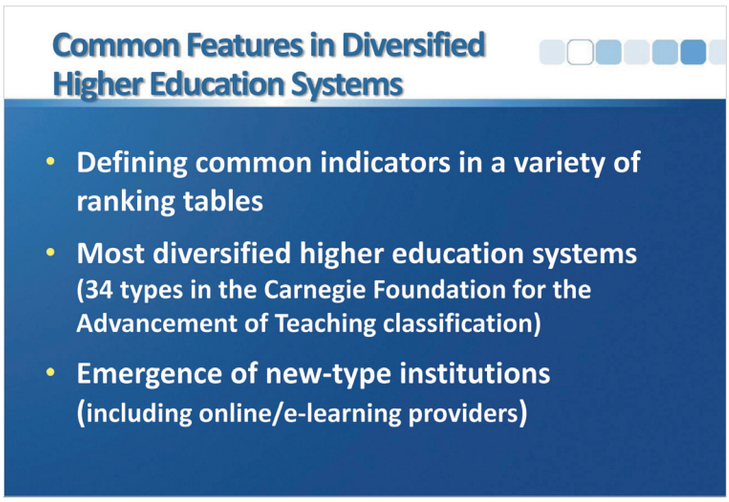
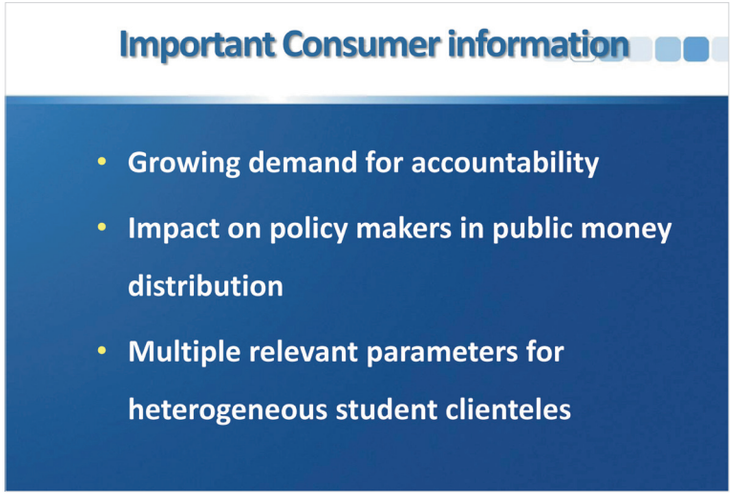


A third underlying premise behind the ranking tables is related to the growing importance of providing reliable information to the clients and consumers of higher education. In all countries there is currently a notable trend towards a growing demand from higher-education institutions to be accountable towards the public and the government. Today, the research and teaching performance of universities has an impact on the way in which policymakers distribute money to different higher-education institutions. The ranking tables assist in executing such a differentiated budgeting, and also provide relevant information to the student clienteles by comparing various potential higher-education institutions before they decide where to enrol.



A fourth underlying premise behind the ranking tables was the need to define multiple relevant parameters for heterogeneous student clienteles and for different stakeholders. We currently have more than 50 ranking tables that use a variety of diverse parameters and indicators. For example, in the Iberoamericano – Pan-Hispanic ranking, 100% of the ranking is related only to research performance. The ranking of the Jiao Tong Shanghai University is based 90% on research, and in the Times Supplement of Higher Education just 20% of the ranking is related to research whereas 40% is devoted to an international opinion survey of academics, 10% to a survey of global employers, 20% to student-staff ratio, and 10% to the proportion of international students and international staff.

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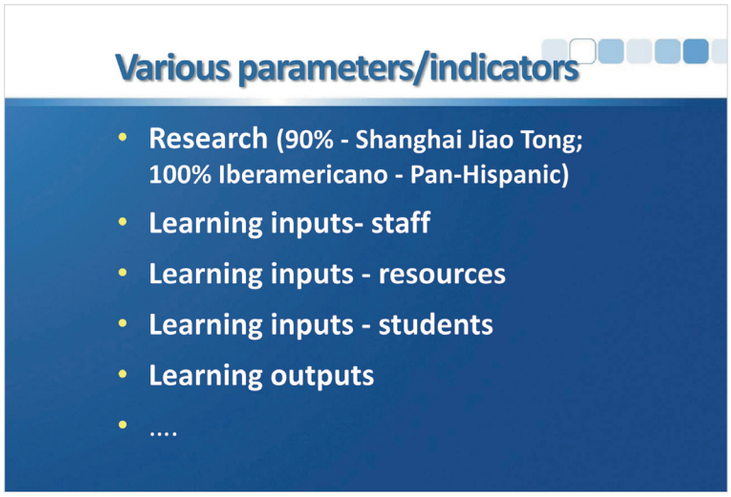

What are the implications of the ranking tables for online institutions?

There are different opinions as to how online institutions should be listed in ranking tables. Should they appear in the mainstream ranking tables and be evaluated on the basis of the same indicators as conventional universities, or should they be ranked in separate tables? I would suggest going both ways. In some disciplines, such as business administration, they should be ranked as part of the mainstream. Just an example from Israel: we have an evaluation policy of our Higher Education Council and each year they choose two or three disciplines and evaluate them across all the higher-education institutions through an expert committee comprised of experts from the United States and some other countries. The MBA at the Open University got a very high opinion in this evaluation that took place two years ago. But in many other domains, they should be ranked separately. Potential students that are willing to compare different distance-education or online providers will be greatly assisted by separate ranking tables.

When we want to rank online providers, we encounter a critical question: What are online institutions?
Last year, I published a book on *Digital Technologies in Higher Education: Sweeping Expectations and Actual Effect*s. The fact is most of the applications of e-learning are taking place right now in campus-based universities, as a supplement to face-to-face encounters, and most of the large-scale distance-teaching

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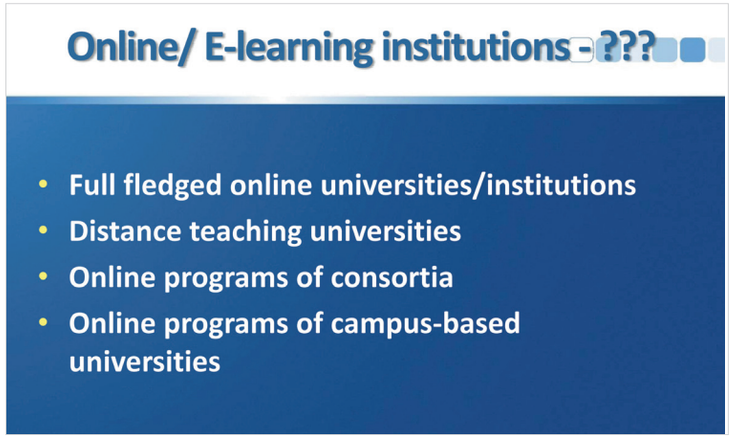
universities are not providing their studies through the digital technologies. The Open University of Catalonia is very exceptional in this case because it was established from the very start as an online university. In Portugal, the Open University was transformed a few years ago into an online university, but the British Open University by no means can be defined as an online university, neither is the Open University of Israel, or Indira Gandhi University in India. In other words, distance education and e-learning are not the same thing. They do overlap in many cases, but they do not constitute synonymous terms. Such a situation creates a problem as to how to group distance teaching universities and online providers in ranking tables. Is it more important to group them as distance-teaching institutions, or is it advisable to refer mainly to online providers, including also campus-based universities offering online programmes?



The fact that many distance-teaching universities teach huge numbers of students constitutes an important parameter. More than ten years ago John Daniel published a book on *Mega Universities*. He argued that universities that enrol more than 100,000 students are mega universities and their logistics and operational strategy are very different from a university which is much smaller. There are currently distance-teaching universities in China, India and Indonesia that teach over a million, or even several million, students. Size should be an indicator in ranking distance-teaching providers.

Today we have many institutional forms of distance education – single-mode universities, dual-mode universities, extensions, consortia, etc. In addition we have many online programmes offered by conventional universities. So right now distance-education and online institutions form a highly heterogeneous group, and it is impossible to treat them as a generic group. There is an urgent need to classify the many institutional forms of distance-education and online institutions into different categories before they can be ranked in mainstream or special ranking tables.

Now let's turn to the relevant parameters for ranking online/distance-education institutions. It seems to me that **reputation**, **national and international**, is very important. For many years, when distance education was provided mainly by correspondence institutions, distance education suffered from a very bad reputation. After the British Open University was established, it gained a lot of respect for distance education, because of the quality it provided and the way it showed that it's possible to teach many students and provide them with high-quality education at a lower cost.

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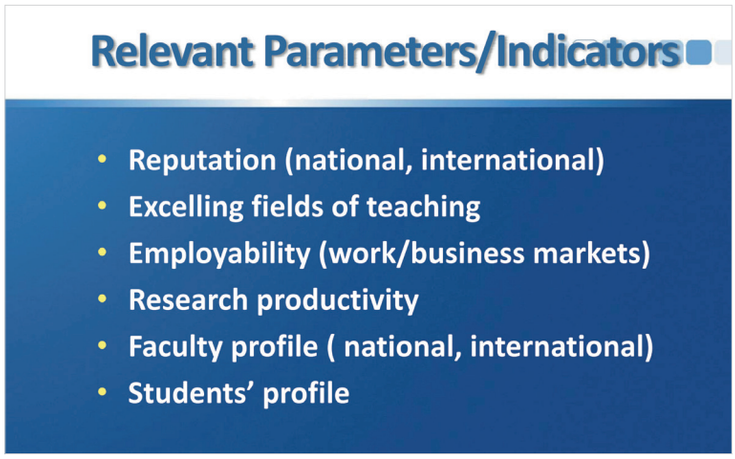

Today, with the emergence of the new digital technologies and provision of so many online programmes, some of them are not considered of high quality. We are currently witnessing a regression in which some online providers are seen as fly-by-night and bogus institutions. The E-xcellence Project by UNESCO is trying to assure quality for online education, and it's still in progress. The Open University of Catalonia has succeeded in establishing its reputation in a very short time, and it should become a leader in defining indicators for online universities.

An additional important indicator should relate to **excelling fields of teaching** of various universities. In the existing ranking tables there is a reference to different domains of knowledge. Most universities cannot be excellent in everything. It's not that the governments are spending less money on higher education today. In most states governments are spending more money on higher education compared to a few decades ago. But it is impossible to spend the same amount on each student in the face of the huge massification of higher-education systems that took place in the last 50 years. At the beginning of the 20th century, the percentage of people studying higher education was 2-5% of the relevant age cohorts in European countries. Right now the participation rate of relevant age cohorts in developed countries is over 50%. The fact that so many students are currently studying in higher-education institutions naturally affects the amount allocated per student by government. It's quite obvious that universities should define their fields of excellence. Also online institutions should define excelling fields of teaching and it should be expressed and reflected in the ranking tables.

The **employability** of distance-education and online graduates is an additional important indicator for the ranking of distance education and online institutions. One of the buzzwords right now is lifelong learning, and it will also be a very important factor in the European Union 7th Framework. Open universities and online providers are geared to lifelong learning, professional development, and providing working people with the opportunity to study and continue studying. So it should be a very important indicator of how graduate students of online universities are regarded by the business and work markets. It also constitutes an important indicator in some of the existing rankings for conventional universities.

Research productivity is definitely also an important indicator for the ranking of distance education and online providers. We have in our universities professors that publish in *Nature* and *Science*, but most academic faculty in such universities publish in a variety of academic journals, some of which have not yet established their high academic credibility. Most of these journals are not listed in the A and B impact factors. Research productivity should be measured in distance-teaching and online institutions by paying attention to relevant fields of scholarship.

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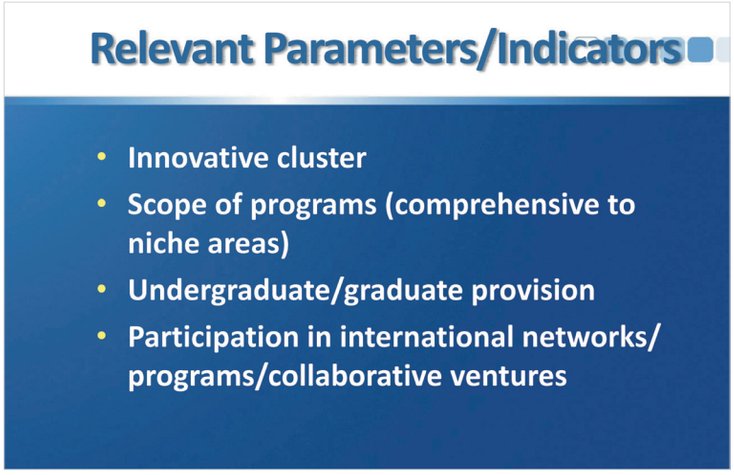
The **faculty and student profiles** are additional indicators to be considered in the ranking of distance-education and online institutions. It is important to evaluate to what extent such institutions have become a touchstone for international faculty and an international student clientele. I was very impressed last year, while staying on a summer sabbatical at the Open University of Catalonia, to learn that professors from different countries are involved in some of the programmes , such as in the master's degree in Conflictology, and that in all of the graduate programmes there are international advisory committees formed by professors from the leading universities in the United States and different European countries.

The **innovative cluster of universities** forms an additional important indicator for evaluation and ranking. When the British Open University was established, it was very innovative. I once wrote a book on *Distance and Campus Universities: Tensions and Interactions* (it was published in 1999). In the book I compared the operation of the British Open University, FernUniversität in Germany, Athabasca in Canada, UNED in Spain, and the Israeli Open University. The most innovative university was the British Open University. It was innovative in various domains – it adopted an open admission policy, it initiated a course-team approach for developing academic programmes, it initiated the modular course system in England, it started its academic year in February instead of September/October in order to be able to utilize the facilities of campus universities for summer schools, it initially restricted the age of its students to 25 and over, and so on. The Israeli Open University enables young students to study academic courses, and some of them complete an academic degree concurrently with their high-school diploma. We currently have around 1,000 young students. Most of them are outstanding students in high school, mainly in mathematics and computer science. Open admission, technological infrastructure, interdisciplinary programmes, degree of flexibility, lifelong learning, and so on constitute innovative parameters, which a wide clientele of students might be interested in learning about.



The **scope of programmes** provided by distance and online higher-education institutions is an additional relevant parameter for ranking. It is important to examine the domains on which a university focuses. Most distance-teaching and online providers do not teach medicine, nuclear physics and biology, but rather focus on high-demand disciplines. It is important to relate to the scope and range of programmes in the ranking of such institutions.

The **undergraduate/graduate provision** reflects the major thrust of each university. Many distance-teaching and online universities focus mainly on undergraduate education, but some provide very successful graduate and postgraduate programmes. Many studies indicate that there is a highly impressive completion rate in online education in masters studies. In some high-demand areas, such as business administration, ranking tables might provide highly valuable information for potential student constituencies.

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And the last indicator which I would like to refer to is **participation in international networks/programmes/ collaborative ventures**. One important impact of the ranking tables is enhancing the drive to collaborate and create collaborative ventures between universities, and between the academic and corporate worlds. Collaboration is a very important factor in current research projects and in promoting the mobility of students, faculty and programmes between countries, as is taking place right now within the Bologna Process framework. Online and distance-teaching institutions might play a very important role in future collaborative ventures, and it should be reflected in their ranking.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Academic Ranking and Quality Assurance in Online Education

Josep Anton Ferré Vidal
(Director of the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, AQU)

Dr Ferré Vidal has a doctorate degree in Chemical Sciences from the University of Barcelona and holds the chair of Fluid Mechanics in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the Rovira i Virgili University. In addition to his work in teaching, he also has an extensive career in the field of research: he has participated in over forty research projects, of which he has led eleven; he is the head researcher of a consolidated research group; and he has directed five doctoral theses. He has also published forty articles in scientific journals and monographs and presented sixty-seven papers in congresses.

Thank you very much for your introduction. It's nice when somebody in the university thinks you've only been in this position at AQU for a year, when in fact you've been working there for the last two years, because this means that our activity as a QA agency has not been too boring and not too nasty, or maybe even a little bit interesting.

My speech today is divided into two parts: I'll briefly explain what we do with the universities here in Catalonia and then go on to talk about some straight-forward ideas about quality assurance and rankings.

The title of my presentation is "Quality Assurance and Rankings," so I'll start here with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European High Education Area* document (or ESG for short). You know full well that this document is one of the founding documents of ENQA, the network of European agencies, and in fact if you go through the document, through the three long sections on the internal quality

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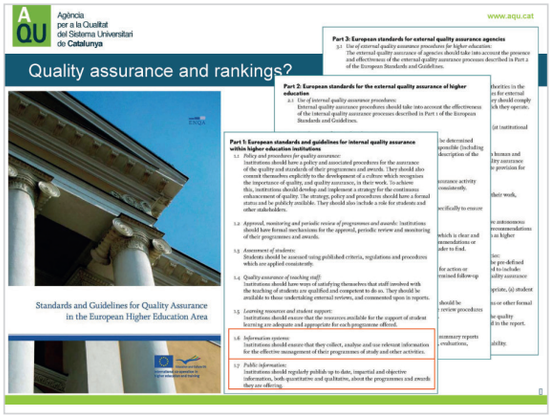

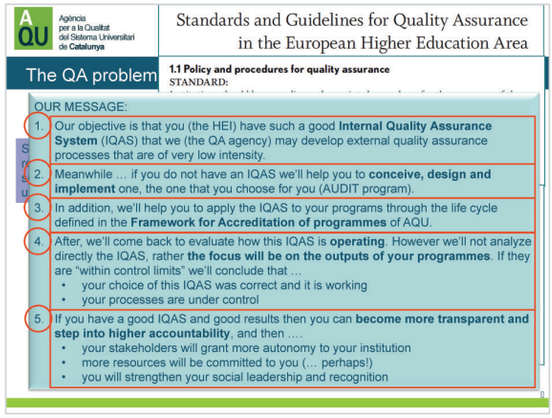

assurance activities of HEIs, the external quality assurance activities carried out by QA agencies, and the quality assurance of the agencies themselves, the word ***ranking*** doesn't appear anywhere. So it would initially appear that rankings and quality assurance are not the same business. I'll just mention two things about this: standard 1.6 and standard 1.7, on information systems and public information, because later on you'll see that some of the paragraphs relating to these standards do in fact point to things that will be connected with rankings.

As far as we are concerned, what is the problem right now with quality assurance? The problem is that when you read the ESG, the first standard, point 1.1, is very clearly about policy and procedures for quality assurance within the HEI, and it says that, to this end, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. Okay, so by their very nature and in their DNA, as it were, institutions have to inherently possess quality and be responsible for the quality of their processes, products and services. And for QA agencies, whose work is external QA, our dream is to have to work as little as possible, in the sense that if higher education institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality processes, and if these processes properly assure quality and standards, then the external processes could be less intensive than otherwise.

This is not so easy however, because some higher education institutions in Spain have maybe read this, but they haven't totally understood it. Our objective then is for HEIs to have in place good internal quality-assurance systems so that we, the agencies, can develop external quality-assurance processes that are as low in intensity as possible. This is the most important thing. Meanwhile, most institutions have been unaccustomed to doing this, so we've been helping them to develop these procedures by setting up various programmes, like the programme known as AUDIT, which helps the universities to conceive the design for internal quality-assurance systems and to implement them.

We also help the universities to apply their internal quality-assurance systems to what is referred to as the "life cycle" of programmes that they develop, as defined in the *Framework for Programme Accreditation*. Under Spanish regulations, the focus is on programme review, and not institutional review, and all programmes must go through an initial ex-ante accreditation, then a follow-up procedure and finally an accreditation. This means that the work of the Agency mainly focuses on the quality assurance of programmes, and to a much greater degree than other agencies where the main focus is on institutional review.

Following this, we return to evaluate how the internal quality assurance system (IQAS) is running, although the focus here is on the outputs, not the IQAS. We look at how good the programmes are, how well they are being run, if you are producing good products. Sorry, but I'm a chemical engineer, I've been teaching quality control to my chemical engineering students for many years, so perhaps my approach to quality control is

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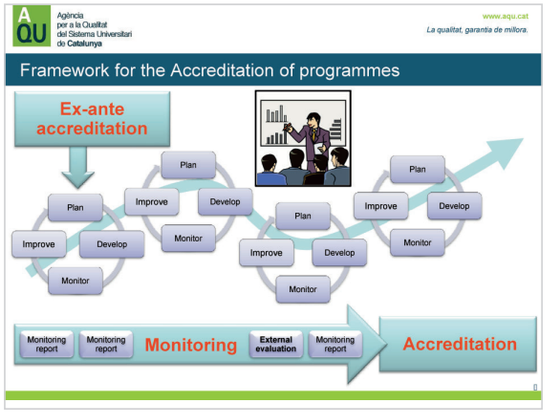
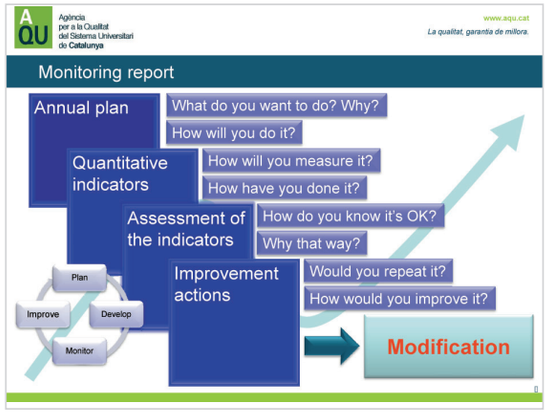
too industrial. But my approach to quality assurance, and that of many agencies, is that universities deliver products, and these products are teaching, they are education, and as such they have to comply with the standards that have been set for them.

If one has a good internal quality-assurance system and your results (outcomes) are good, then you can become more transparent and progress towards greater accountability. And then perhaps the stakeholders will grant more autonomy to the institutions and more resources will be allocated – perhaps, perhaps, because as things are here in Spain right now it would seem that, whatever we do, it's going to be very difficult for the universities to get more money. Nevertheless, it will only be through greater transparency and accountability that the universities become more relevant in terms of social leadership and recognition.





What is the so-called framework for programme accreditation? I'll show you three or four slides explaining what we have been developing with the universities. So we start here, with the ex-ante accreditation. This is a process that is carried out every year, in which you plan what has to be done over the next academic year, i.e. you develop your activities, you monitor them, and at the end of this monitoring you should have ideas to be able to write some enhancement proposals. This is basically a PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, which you can repeat year after year, and in the meantime some external reviews take place, as this is compulsory for all programmes. This means that over time you build up a series of annual monitoring reports that, together with the external evaluation, will give you enough information that can be submitted in an accreditation process. Now, the thing is that we need to deal with the large amount of work involved with the ex-ante accreditation, because the problem is that then everything gets forgotten for five or six years until the process has to be repeated. The main effort needs to focus on the middle part of this process, i.e. the follow-up.

The monitoring report. In this model shown in the slide, a monitoring report, with four simple parts or pages, has to be prepared every year for every study programme: a first page with the annual plan, a second page with the quantitative indicators that let you know how things are going with the programme, a third page with your opinions on the indicators, and a final page with the enhancement proposals. This is intended as food for thought for your annual review of what you are doing and what needs to be done next year so that things get improved. It fundamentally means getting answers to questions like: Why do you do that? How do you do it? How do you measure it? How do you know it's OK? Would you repeat it in the same way? Following on from this, modifications to programmes sometimes need to be made.

What are the quantitative indicators that have been set in place with the universities? Just to go over this briefly, an experimental programme was developed in conjunction with the universities, with just two programmes per university, during which we came to the conclusion that there is a process going on in the university with inputs and outputs. In terms of output, the students are different to what they were when they came to university

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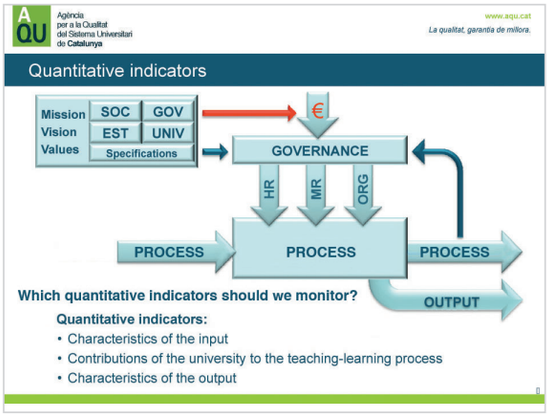
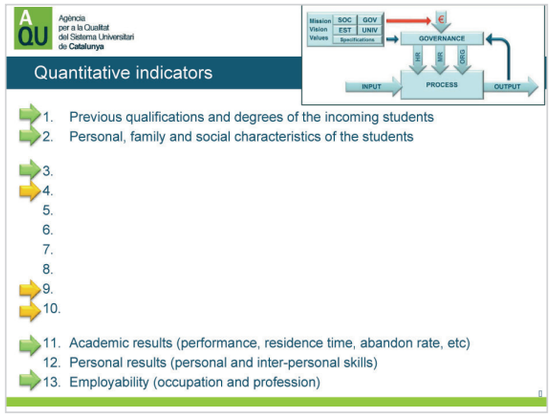
because something has been added to them, they have acquired something. As a chemical engineer, I know that when you have a container and you put, say, a liquid into it but add nothing else, then what comes out the end is the same as what was put into it.





So why is it that when people leave university they are different to what they were when they entered it? It's because human and physical resources, together with organisation, have all been added to them. At university, students come in contact with teachers, students spend time in the library, laboratories, etc., and use is made of teaching techniques and methodologies so that when they leave university they are better citizens and better professionals.

The problem, however, as you can see from the slide, is that there is just one source of money, and one needs a lot of brain power (or skill at juggling) to sort out how to administer putting money into hiring more people while spending money on buying more equipment and/or spending money on making the organisation different. And this normally has to be done in such a way that the specifications are complied with and the expectations of your stakeholders are fulfilled. And here comes the complicated bit: there are four groups of stakeholders – employers and society in general; policy makers; the students themselves; and university staff and employees – and it is very difficult to reconcile the expectations of these four groups of stakeholders. So it really is an art to be able to write a single definition of what needs to be done, OK, it's an art. But then comes the complication of how to control programme accreditation.

So, together with the universities, we finally decided to use this set of indicators (in the slide) for the follow-up process. Firstly, there are some indicators that deal with the students, what they are like when they enter university, their previous qualifications and degrees and their personal, family and social characteristics, all of which are the inputs. And then we have what are considered to be the outputs, namely, the academic results and learning outcomes, the achievement rate, the residence time, the drop-out rate, etc. of the students; there are the personal outcomes, or the personal and inter-personal skills they have acquired; and then there is of course graduate employability.

And in between there are various indicators relating to the things being added to the system, i.e. the resources that bring about this transformation between the input and the output I was talking about. Firstly, the number of teaching hours and the type of teachers, with their qualifications and skills, the number of lecture hours, the number of seminar hours, labs, etc. and average group size. There are some indicators dealing with the physical resources being used, including classrooms, labs, libraries, and other facilities and materials.

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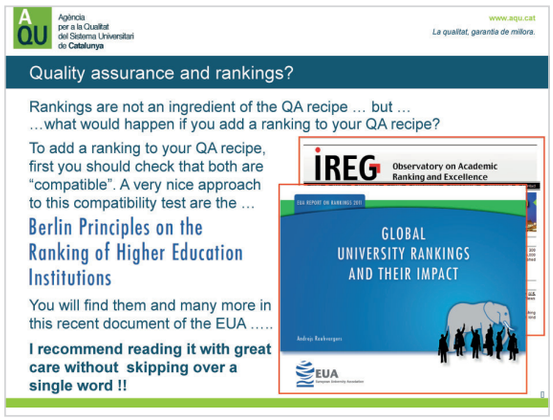
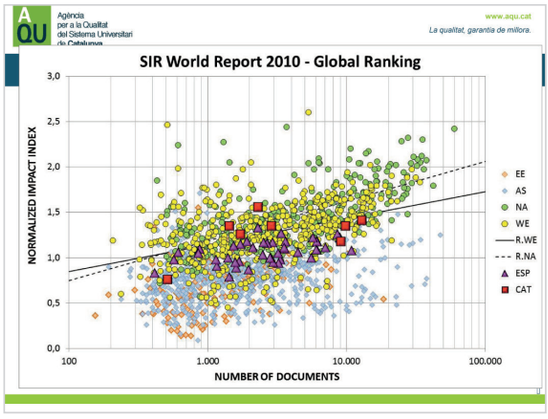
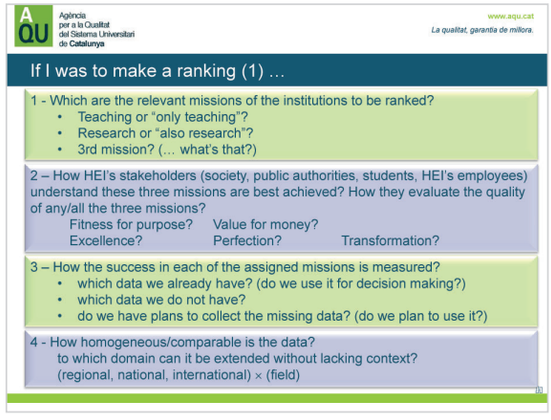


Then there is the use of the virtual (distance-learning) campus, which I mention not because we are at the UOC (Open University of Catalonia), where it is the main resource used, but because it came up during the experimental programmes with all the universities. And in saying this I'm answering one of the questions that was discussed here, i.e. whether or not distance-learning universities should come under a different classification. And finally, at least 4 indicators on the organisation: 1) the availability, updatability and usability of the website information, i.e. the public information; 2) evidence of the assessment methods; 3) student internships, mobility and career advice; and 4) student satisfaction and teacher satisfaction. Some of these indicators are already available because most of the data on higher education in Catalonia has been collected over the last year, some of them are still being worked on, while others still have to be started. Nevertheless, right now we have enough data to develop a reasonable set of quantitative indicators.

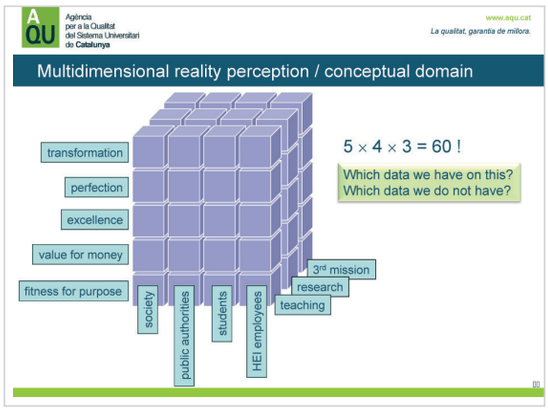


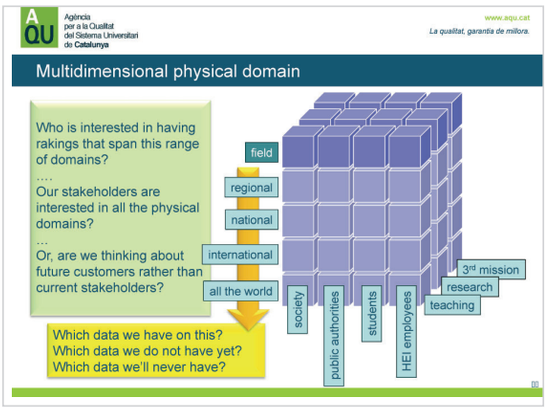


This next slide deals with one of the possible recipes for quality assurance. As far as we are concerned as a QA agency, rankings are not an ingredient of the quality-assurance recipe, but what would happen if we added a ranking to our quality-assurance recipe? You know, when you have a normal recipe and you think, "What would happen if I add this other ingredient?" Firstly, in order to add a ranking to your quality-assurance recipe, you need to check that both are compatible. A very good approach to such a compatibility test is that given in the Berlin Principles on Rankings of Higher Education Institutions. There are versions in English, French, Polish, Russian, Chinese and German on the website, and there are several different versions. And there are all the rankings and many more in this recent document by the EUA (European University Association). It's very interesting and I highly recommend you read it carefully, and I suggest you don't skip over any of the text because they analyse how some of the rankings are cooked, and whether or not they meet the Berlin Principles on the Ranking of Higher Education Institutions. I really insist that you go over this document, which I think is from just this last summer. It's really recent so it's worth getting.

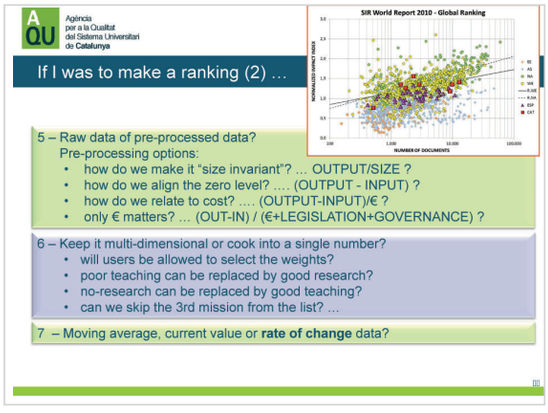
Academic Ranking in Online Education

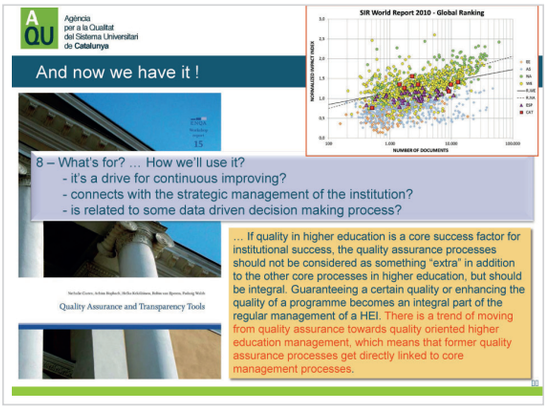
by Josep Anton Ferré Vidal





But now, to explain from my point of view what the difficulties are in making a ranking, I'll have a go myself. To do this, I'll use some data that was collected by the SCImago research group, which is an example of a bibliometric ranking. They've just published the list of two thousand institutions in the world with the number of publications and the normalized impact index of these publications. So what I did was to put them here on a graph, in a plot. This axis here is a logarithmic scale, with a hundred items, a thousand items, ten thousand items, a hundred thousand items, and this one here is the normalised impact index of several university populations. This cluster you see here is Eastern Europe, this is Asia, this is North America, this is Western Europe, and here are some regression lines that show the degree to which volume is associated with a more normalised impact index, and here are the Spanish universities and here the Catalan universities. So which is the best university, the one with the highest volume, in the case of the Spanish universities, or the university with the highest impact index? You can see that the university with the highest impact index has a volume that is roughly half that of the university with the highest volume. I'm not going to go into this any further here, the data is publicly available and you can browse it if you are interested in finding the answer to this and other questions.





So from this point of view I started to make my list, with the thought, "If I was to make a ranking, first I would need to decide what the relevant missions of the institutions being ranked are". Would this be teaching, or just teaching? Research? Or also research? The third mission, or civil-society engagement? (And some people still ask, "what's that?") What ideas do the different stakeholders (society, public authorities, students, higher-education institution employees) have in terms of these three missions being best achieved, i.e. how do they assess when we are good at these missions? Fitness for purpose, value for money, excellence, perfection and transformation are not the same. Value for money is one matter, and fitness for purpose is another, it's a very different one.

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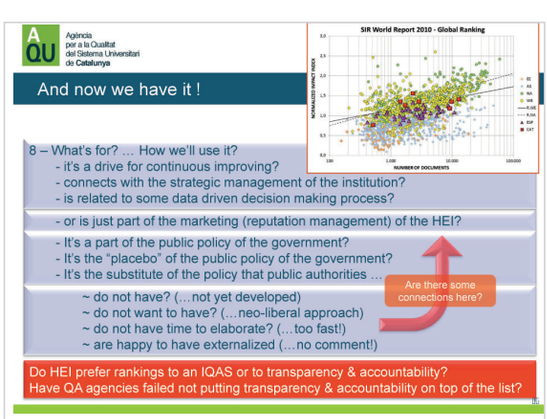
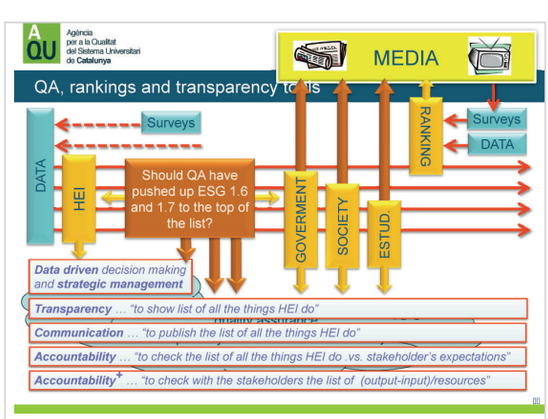
And then how can success in each of these missions be measured, in terms of data that we already have? Obtaining bibliometric data is very easy, but other things are more difficult to get. What data do we have and what don't we have, and how do we plan to go about getting more data? How homogeneous (uniform) and comparable is the data? The use of plots is very useful (for presenting data), and here I've plotted the four stakeholders: society, public authorities, students, and employees. Here are the different ways of understanding quality, and here the universities' three missions. And out of this I came up with something like sixty possible combinations, depending on which stakeholder you are, what your point of view is, and which mission you are focused on. So it's not easy, because sometimes we don't even have any data for some of these aspects.

I call this the conceptual domain, but there is a second domain, the multidimensional physical domain, because you can try to do this in a subject area or field of knowledge, but you can also do it on a regional, national or international basis, or for the whole world. And you can see that, as the physical domain gets bigger and bigger, if you want homogeneous (uniform) data, then you have to rely on data that is less consistent. So the question here is, who is interested in having rankings that span this range of domains? Are our stakeholders interested? My stakeholders? Are the stakeholders that I have in the agency interested in this physical domain or all of this? Maybe it's an issue of future or prospective customers as to current stakeholders. All of these are relevant questions.

And for our ranking, is it raw or pre-processed data? Can the data size be made invariable? For example, one institution may be smaller than another, so we can't expect this other institution to have the same volume. Or how do we align the zero level? The institutions' inputs are not all the same, the students entering universities aren't all the same, they're different, and more emphasis sometimes needs to be put on the institution's ability to transform the inputs instead of the absolute value of its outputs. One last thing: are we going to keep it multi-dimensional or can we cook it all together into a single number that averages out apples and hens? Gero has been explaining his position concerning this, about the multi-dimensionality and how to deal with it. However, the most interesting and relevant question from my point of view is: what is all this for? How will the ranking ultimately be used? Will these rankings help to drive continuous enhancement? Will they connect up with an institution's strategic management? Will they be linked to some data-driven decision-making process in HEIs? And in fact if you look at another paper, a recent paper on *Quality Assurance and Transparency Tools*, based on a workshop organised by ENQA, there is a changing trend from quality assurance towards more quality- oriented higher-education management, which means that what were formerly quality-assurance processes are now becoming directly linked to core management processes. And this is my point: are rankings linked to core management processes in HEIs, or are they merely a matter of reputation management?





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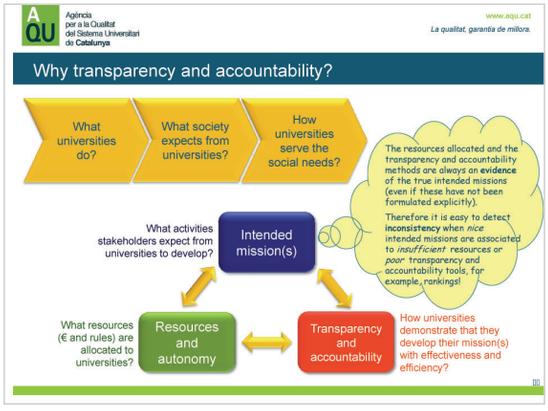
I say the same again here (with this slide), but now I'll add some extra questions.
What's this for? Are rankings part of government public policy? Is it just a placebo for government public policy, or is it a substitute for a public policy that the authorities don't have, or one they don't want to have, a kind of enhanced neoliberal approach? Everything is happening very fast, decisions have to be made, and there is not enough time to study the alternatives. As we all know, things don't happen too fast in the universities. Students take not just a few months, but several years to finish their studies. And sometimes I see certain connections between this approach to the universities by the public authorities and reputation management. Nevertheless, I do also sometimes think that perhaps it might better for higher-education institutions to have rankings rather than to have to show that they have an internal quality-assurance system and that they are transparent and accountable. This is why sometimes the universities would prefer rankings over a QA procedure.



But the problem for the agencies, from my point of view, is that perhaps we have failed by not putting transparency and accountability at the top of the list. The data do exist, and higher-education institutions, policy makers, society and students, according to standards 1.6 and 1.7, should share some common ground regarding quality assurance, accountability, quality enhancement and transparency. And do you know what went and happened? Due to the fact that we didn't perhaps take this seriously enough, the media then appeared on the scene. They took some data, they took some surveys, made some rankings and got everyone's attention. And as institutions devoted to university quality assurance, we have to put up with this. Transparency means showing the list of all the things that we do. Communication means publishing and disseminating the list of all the things we do. Accountability means checking the list of all the things we do against the expectations of our stakeholders. And perhaps one definition that could be used for "enhanced accountability" with the stakeholders is checking the list of outputs minus inputs divided by resources, i.e. not only the effectiveness of our actions (outputs), but also the efficiency of our actions, namely, (output-input)/ resources.

So my final comment is that perhaps quality-assurance agencies should have pushed standards 1.6 and 1.7 to the top of the list so that rankings would now have less appeal.

Why transparency and accountability? Because in my mind's eye there is a relationship between intended missions, resources and autonomy, and transparency and accountability. What activities do stakeholders expect universities to develop and what resources are allocated to universities? How do universities demonstrate that they are able to use the resources to accomplish the mission they have been assigned?

Academic Ranking in Online Education

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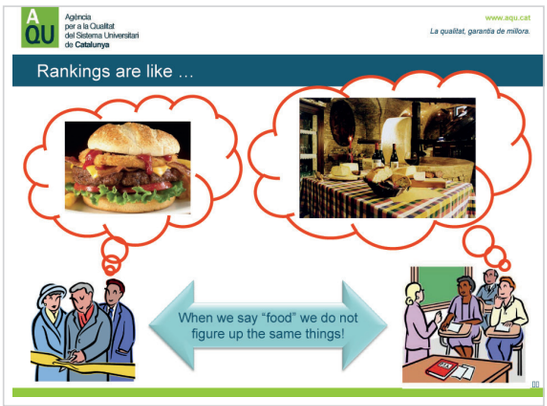
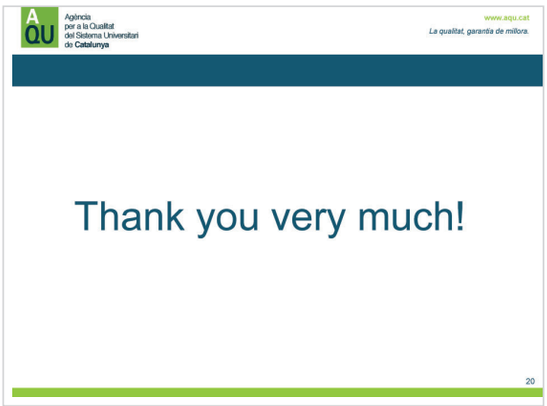




One final idea in relation to your conclusions on all of this: I'd say that the quality-assurance recipe and the rankings recipe possibly share some common ground, in that they perhaps share some common ingredients, but I think that they need to be prepared in very different ways, served with different dressings, and their purposes are also very different. A sandwich is not the same as a cake. And if you carefully read the ranking recipe, it's difficult to find any reference to fitness for purpose or even value for money. And fitness for purpose is really the mission of a higher-education institution, in that it's associated with the institution's effectiveness, while value for money is all about the resources allocated to the HEI, and therefore to do with its efficiency as an institution.

So to end on a lighter note, if one were to say "food" (i.e. rankings) to politicians and the universities, the two would probably conjure up different things in their minds. The politicians, who are keen on rankings, would probably think something like, "fast food: you can eat it but not all the time, but it's not your staple diet". Whereas at the universities, while some people don't think exactly this way, others perhaps do, but in the sense of modern healthy food, and this overall balance is much closer to a balanced diet than what we know today as fast food, which is not at all healthy. So I would ultimately say to make sure you have a balanced diet (the use of indicators), make transparency and accountability your main ingredients, and use the rankings sparingly but not as the basis for your diet.

Thank you very much.

Academic Ranking and Quality Assurance in Online Education

Richard Yelland
(Head of Education Management, Directorate for Education, OECD)

In this division he manages both the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) and the Centre for Effective Learning Environments (CELE). Current priorities include work on the assessment of higher education learning outcomes and on the internationalisation of higher education.
Mr. Yelland joined OECD in 1986 from the then Department of Education and Science in the United Kingdom where he held a range of posts in educational policy and administration. From January 1997 to March 1998 Richard was seconded to the University of Adelaide, South Australia.
Richard Yelland was born and educated in England, and has a degree from Cambridge University.

Good afternoon everybody. It's good to be here. I'm sorry I missed the first part of the conversation. I've enjoyed the second part and the food for thought that we just had. I'm going to take a very different approach. In fact I'm cheating really.

I've got a good title on the slide: "Academic Ranking and Quality Assurance in Online Education." That's a part of what I'm going to talk about, but not all of it. However, if you've read the abstract, I checked back on it and I've stuck pretty closely to that and I'm taking – deliberately taking – a broad view: looking at the value of higher education in a global context, seeing online education as a legitimate element of that and trying to analyse a little how, in a very distorted market, we can value it effectively. And I will end up talking about the OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes, which I think may have been referred to this morning.

Academic Ranking & Quality A. in Online Education

by Richard Yelland

Up at the top left hand corner here, we have a very sobering five-zero. I don't remember the OECD from fifty years ago, although I was alive at the time. I think some of us were and some of us weren't. I won't ask for a vote on that. But it reminds us how much the world has changed in those fifty years, and indeed in the last fifteen. We wouldn't have been talking about online education very much even ten years ago. Though the OECD's job is – and remains – to monitor, to analyse, to evaluate, to foresee and to advise in a wide number of areas, including education, I'm not going to do publicity for the Institutional Management in Higher Education programme, but I will leave some leaflets because I think many of you will have some interest in some of the other aspects of what we do.

That is a run-through of what I am going to say, but I don't expect you to read that.

Why does all this matter? Higher education has an enduring social value and it offers individuals the possibility to improve their prospects in key areas of their lives. We know, on the one hand, that it is a key factor in economic development, but it's also a powerful means to enhance individuals' lives in all sorts of ways. In fact, this double effect – if you like – is not really a separate thing; the individual effect of higher education and the social impact of higher education are not separate, they are interlinked. And it is this importance of higher education for individuals and for societies which underlies its growth and its importance from the fact that we are, as societies, investing in it in the future. And it is of course part of the reason why it is considered to be important.

Even in such a field as health we can see that better-educated societies have better health outcomes, but we can also see that better-educated individuals have better health outcomes. Research helps with our healthcare, but the things that you learn and understand as individuals help the way in which you work. As groups of individuals we work together. This is extremely complex and requires rather more time than I can give to it today, but this understanding of the importance of higher education for human capital and for social capital – which is relatively new – explains the continuing and growing demand for higher education and governments' and individuals' willingness to invest in it. And, of course, the balance between those two degrees of investment is a matter of political debate and leads you on to funding and tuition fees. That is not a part I am going to go down, but I just wanted to make the first key point about the value of higher education for societies and for individuals. That is not going away, it is growing and it is growing globally.

So, what is higher education? Well, it is just that *"higher" (pause) "education"*. This slide reminds us that learning, education, has a number of aspects. This is UNESCO's four pillars of learning: learning to know, which has perhaps traditionally been emphasised particularly strongly in our university systems; learning to do, perhaps the more vocational side of things; learning to live together; and learning to be, which are not explicit objectives in outcomes of higher education, but they're certainly implicit.

Higher education's added value in this complex learning process is a part of what it is that rankings are trying to get at. And I like your point about how, in systems and institutions, higher education has not been particularly good at being transparent, and that is why other people have done it for us. And they will continue to do it for us unless we do it for ourselves.

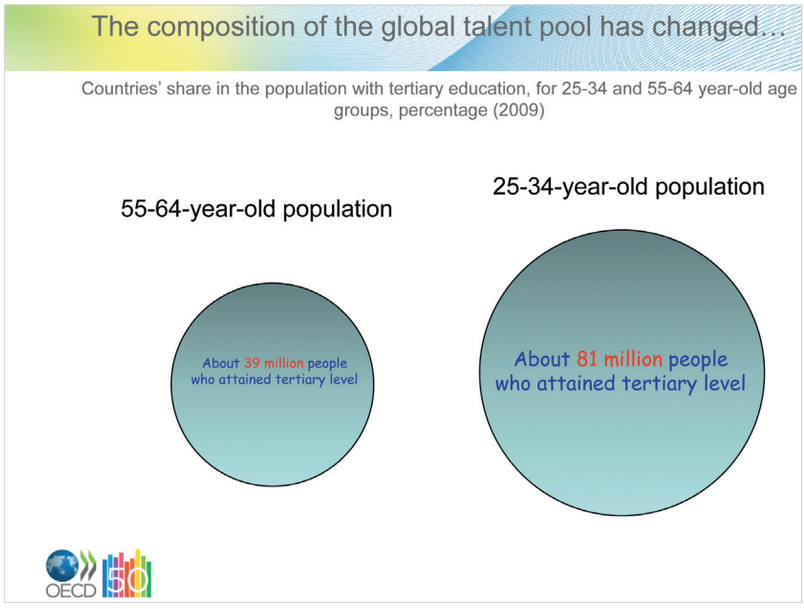
So that takes us to some questions about what we actually know about the learning outcomes in higher education, what the process is that higher education institutions go through and induce and how higher education translates into social capital. And then the subject for today, which is: "In what way is this online education any different from classroom-based education?" That is really the core question. It's to do with legitimacy and status and some of the things we were talking about before the coffee break.

Academic Ranking & Quality A. in Online Education

by Richard Yelland

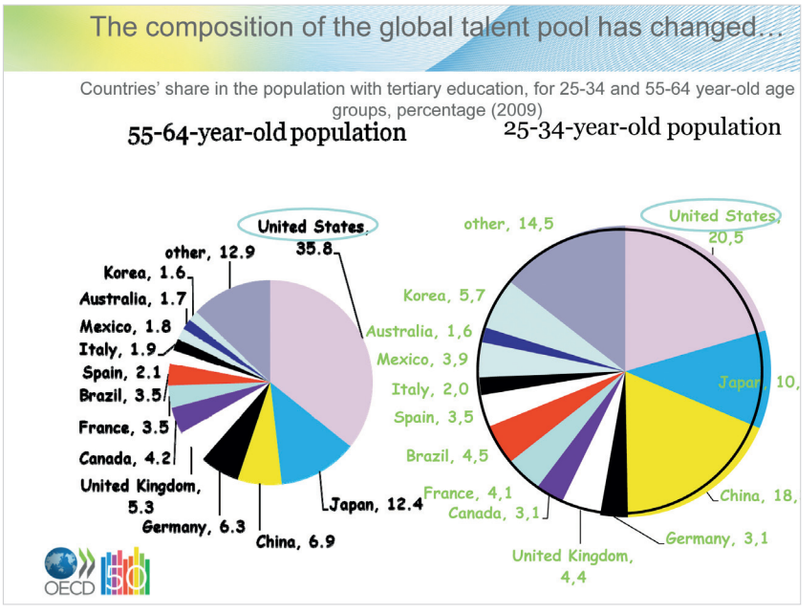
The underlying political challenge is – because of the importance of higher education for economies and for society – how to broaden access to it while maintaining quality and value. The political "name of the game" for anybody who is running a system is to try to ensure fairness, efficiency and quality. You can't just pick two of those three. That is the challenge.

So, let's move on to the global context, if you like. Higher education has grown. Some of you will have noticed that last week we published the 2011 edition of ***Education at a Glance***. That is a massive book. I didn't even bring one copy with me, let alone enough for all of you. I will say that all the data and a lot of the analysis is available online if you are interested in that; you don't need to get the print publication. That publication often spends a lot of time on tertiary education because that is where things are changing very fast. Just one of the things which I picked out of it this year is the more than doubling in the number of people in these two different age groups.

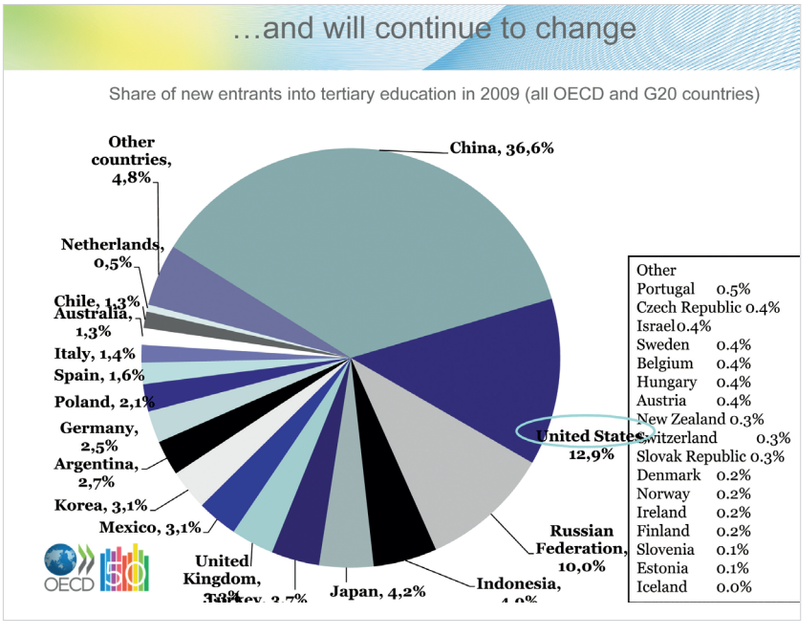


You have tertiary education at the basis. This is not actually a global chart; the basis for this is 36 countries where we have comparable data. But if you look at the 55 to 64-year-olds, there are about 39 million with tertiary education, and some of those would have achieved that since they were 25 through adult learning, through online learning and through distance learning. So in terms of the size of the system the increase is even greater than that. That's the raw number.

Academic Ranking & Quality A. in Online Education *by Richard Yelland*

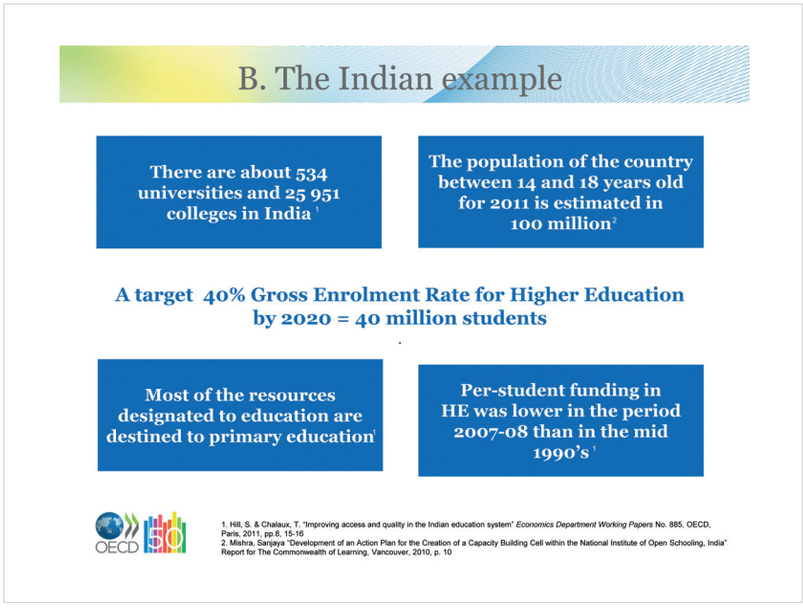


The country shares in that population and the changes in those are quite interesting as well. Again, this is just taking the 36 countries. I am going to talk a little bit about India in a moment. India is not there because we didn't have the comparable data for it. But of that 39 million, 36 are in the United States; 12 in Japan; 6 in China. When you look at the 25 to 34-year-old population you will see that China has become almost as big as America and you can expect that to change. So this is a point which you are all well aware of, but sometimes it is good to illustrate it, about how the world is changing. And the demand for higher education in the developing world, outside the OECD, is going to continue to grow.



Academic Ranking & Quality A. in Online Education *by Richard Yelland*

If you look at the people who are coming in to higher education, that is what it looks like now, so that shows you that that boom is coming along, and let me remind you again India is not there.



Let me say something about India. It is – or will be – the most populous country in the world. It has some very complex challenges in terms of its higher-education system. We think that there are somewhere around 500 universities and 26,000 colleges in India. And there are a lot of questions about definition. The population between 14 and 18-year-olds is estimated to be about a hundred million. For obvious reasons, perhaps most of the resources devoted to education are going to primary education, and per-student funding in higher education is actually lower recently than it was in the 1990s. And yet their plan is to achieve a gross enrolment rate… I'm sorry, there is a typo there, that should say 30% gross enrolment rate, but the 40 million students is correct. That's up from 13%.

Now, it seems to me that that is not going to happen in the conventional way. I regard that as a self-evident truth, we can debate it. There are already more than a 100 higher education institutions offering distance-learning programmes, not necessarily online. Indira Gandhi University has more than 3 million enrolled students and there are another one and a half million in the National Institute of Open Schooling. The point I'm trying to make is that as higher education develops, distance and online learning are not going to be marginal or alternative or supplementary; they will have to be a core strategy in the policy mix.

So, let's move on a little bit. Distance learning I would see as the ancestor of online learning, if you like. It is not a novel tool and it has probably been around for 100 to 150 years. The British Open University is getting on for 50 years old. The biggest challenge was – and still is – establishing legitimacy, and that is why Open University students, however they have learnt, through television –and there were some wonderful technical innovations, but there was also some conventional stuff, and more recently they're using online learning much more widely – had to sit down in rooms, together, and write out answers to exam questions, because that was the only way in which that institution could demonstrate to the other universities who, let it be remembered, would have stifled that institution at birth, had they had the opportunity. It was only a very strong political push which enabled it to take off in the first place and, I think, spawn a whole number of imitators. Legitimacy, quality: these are at the core of online and distance education.

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Things get even more complicated with online learning, because there is, as with face-to-face education, an international dimension, and that also was pointed out in the after-lunch session. It has traditionally been the case that some countries have exported higher education, that is to say they have brought people to them, or they have set up campuses in other countries. And this can be face-to-face or it can be online. It is asymmetrical, there are importers and there are exporters, but some of the exporters are becoming consumers themselves and some of the importers – like China – have ambitions to become exporters. I think half a million international students was the last figure I saw for the Chinese national plan. So it's a pretty complicated and complex sector that we have to deal with.

And those who are in policy positions, as well as running institutions or running quality-assurance agencies, have to find ways of governing that system, which does not stifle innovation but does not allow fraud to flourish. The final complicating factor – this is particularly true in some countries, and in the United States it's been a big issue – is the coexistence of for-profit and not-for-profit institutions in the same business, if you like.

So (I will make the whole presentation available, I'm really just making a few comments on it) if higher education has value, which I would suggest that it has (I hope nobody would disagree with that), if it is going to grow, which I think is indisputable, if it must incorporate online learning, whether it is in a blended form or in separate institutions, then the question is how can we build up its legitimacy. I think that is the question that underlies this event, this meeting.

Unfortunately, higher education is a very odd market. We sometimes see the same product delivered at different prices. Quality is determined by completely unreliable proxies: some of the existing rankings that we have. Some very good suppliers aren't trying to sell anything; some very bad ones are trying to sell as much as they possibly can. And the most widely accepted proxy for quality, particularly internationally, is rankings, which have grown and increased their influence, really, in only a very few years, probably since 2004 when Shanghai came out. That creates enormous difficulties, I think, for all higher-education institutions, but particularly for online learning.

And that just really summarises that point, that confidence in the quality of higher education is essential, so accreditation and quality assurance and rankings and transparency and all these things, which must be taken together, really need to demonstrate the legitimacy and the comparability with face-to-face learning and you have to avoid or get beyond the perceptions of quality purveyed by international rankings, which are almost entirely based on research. That much is familiar to you.

And to add further complexity to the argument, I think higher education is widely conceived of as a public good. There's a growing tendency to believe that it has to work with the private sector, and you can see that particularly in my country of origin, which is England. I'm not here to defend the British Government or to attack it, I just observe. It is certainly a fascinating experiment that they are going through and a very bold one, I think. And as I said, it is a segmented market with asymmetric international rules. Some institutions and systems are effectively public monopolies, other are highly autonomous private businesses. And the information that would enable the market – and I make no apology for suggesting it is a market because I think that is what we have, for some people, not necessarily for all – that information that would enable the market to function more efficiently is lacking.

And governmental control, one of the things that my colleagues analysed in terms of national policies, establishes the rules of the game within that country. Europe is beginning to establish Europe-wide – although rules is probably too strong a word – commonalities of practice, but the international market, which gets so much attention, is very weakly regulated, and particularly weakly regulated when it comes to online. Every higher-education system is different, but their constituent parts are operating in a convergent world. And – as I said – the problem for government is to foster quality, equity and efficiency without inducing unhelpful incentives.

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by Richard Yelland

We are in a market where goods are not exchanged on the basis of price, but on perceptions of quality and social value. If you're trying to assess reforms you need to understand what it is you're trying to achieve. And this is where, I think, the experiment that we are conducting with an Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes could be particularly valuable because assessment, evaluation, quality assurance and rankings, preferably, have to focus as far as possible on outputs, what is achieved, not on inputs, because this has been the bugbear of online education. If you count the student-staff ratios, or you look at the synergies or all the other things, then online and distance education is bound to fail the test. And looking at outputs should help to fit into a system which is more demand-driven, rather than one which is supply-driven.

I will just, in the last four or five minutes that I have, give you a quick overview of what the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes is and is trying to achieve, because I think it is relevant to face-to-face learning as much as it is to online learning. So, it's intended to provide comparative data internationally by creating measures which would be valid for different cultures and languages and for different types of institutions. The use of quite a wide range of measures – repeating what I have already said – will provide a more balanced assessment of higher-education quality as far as teaching and learning are concerned.

You made the point that people do not actually understand what the third mission is very often, and we have done some other work, which is really trying to foster and develop the contribution that higher-education institutions collectively make to regional economic and social and cultural development. That is extremely important. But measures and evaluations in that area are – I would say – even further away than effective measures in teaching and learning. I know, in the context of the development of the U-Multirank, that the measures of regional engagement were some of the most difficult things to agree on, and I'm not sure that we really got very far down that path because the definitions are so difficult.

This is a feasibility study whose purpose is to assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of learning outcomes are scientifically possible – like whether they actually mean anything – and then whether you can actually practically implement them. So at the moment we are in a research phase, and assuming we get to a satisfactory outcome, I think there will be considerable interest in taking that forward. We are looking at students at the end of a bachelor degree – towards or near the end – and what we are trying to do is bring the international community together – countries and experts and institutions – and then the contractors have been engaged in developing the assessment frameworks.

We are looking at two disciplines, economics and engineering, and the work which has been done in Europe through Tuning has been extremely valuable in helping us at least start a conversation about learning outcomes in these two areas, in what might be common ground between countries. And then there is a generic skills element, which is an internationalisation if you like of the Collegiate Learning Assessment in the United States. It looks at things like critical thinking and problem solving. Contextual data is absolutely essential in each case. One of the things we will be able to ask is, not only about the institution and how they deliver education, but about students and what their learning styles are.

The paradigm here is PISA. Once you have got the data, you can analyse it and do research on it in all sorts of different ways. And I think that is where the online element would come in. And there is a list of the countries involved, which you don't need to take notes on: you can find all that on the website.

Academic Ranking & Quality A. in Online Education *by Richard Yelland*

This work should come to an end by the end of next year. We are not trying to produce rankings or league tables, we are trying to see if it is actually scientifically possible to devise an assessment which is something students would answer, in some way or other, and whether you can persuade them to do it, whether you can persuade institutions and countries that it's something which is worth doing, and whether the whole package actually produces something which is valuable. At the end of the day, it should be a value-added assessment, because if you can take a snapshot at one time you can probably do it at another.

Once completed, we would hope the AHELO initiative would support the improvement of teaching and learning by helping institutions understand the way in which they can develop students and it should provide a tool for the assessment of quality in online learning as much as in other modes of instruction. I don't think that there would really be much difference. Of course, what it won't measure is the networks and the friendships that people build through higher education, but I think the evidence that we are seeing from the development of social networks now is certainly that, for the younger generation, you don't have to be face-to-face to make those things work either.

So, I've gone on long enough. If you want to reread the abstract you will get the core message. At the end of the day, online education matters because it's going to be an essential part of higher education. And I think assessing its quality is something we're going to achieve. And perhaps if we can look at outputs and outcomes you won't have to become so hung up about the definitions of what counts and what doesn't count. Finally there are my contact details, our website there has a wealth of information, and if you are a ***Twitterer***, you will sometimes find me throwing things out into the ***Twittersphere***.

Thank you.

Academic Ranking and Quality Assurance in Online Education

Ingeborg Bo
(Member of the Board of the European Foundation for Quality in E-learning, EFQUEL)

Ingeborg Bø is member of the Board of Directors of European Foundation for Quality in E-learning (EFQUEL, www.efquel.org). Formerl (from 2003 to 2007) she was President of the European Distance and E-learning Network (EDEN, www.eden-online.org). In 2007 she was granted the title of EDEN Senior Fellow. She is also member of the Board of Trustees of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE, www.icde.org) and chair of its Election Committee.
She has her arts degree from the University of Oslo, Norway. All her professional life she has been working within the field of open and distance education in different positions. She started her career as editor at NKS, one of the biggest distance education institutions in Norway. She was executive director of the Norwegian Association for Distance and Flexible Education (NADE, www.nade-nff.no) for 15 years and now runs her own consultancy business.
Ingeborg Bø has been member of different boards of directors of institutions for adult and distance education, is member of several national and international committees, and has also been member of the international editorial board of the journal LLine, Lifelong learning in Europe.

My presentation will not be about rankings. I will take a bottom-up approach. Let me first express that I am so pleased with Richard's bringing the global perspective into this discussion about ranking and the challenges that we see in the world and the need for education and how distance education, online learning is the answer to many of the challenges that we face. Last week the European Federation for Quality in E-learning (EFQUEL) organized its yearly Innovation Forum in Oeiras, Portugal. The global challenge was addressed directly both by Dr. Asha Kanwar, Vice President of the Commonwealth of Learning, and also by Dr. Wayne Mackintosh, Director of the OER Foundation.

The title of my presentation is "A Quality Dialogue – from Inspection to Inspiration." In EFQUEL we want to see quality as a tool for inspiration rather than for inspection. That is why I am taking a bottom-up approach. I will talk about quality through dialogue, about the context within which we are operating, and present some models for quality assurance – one of them is UNIQUE, a certification for quality use of ICT in higher education offered by EFQUEL – and if I have time, a case study from Norway.

I would like to start with my golden perspectives after 40 years in distance education:
always keep the students' needs in mind use technology to the benefit of learning and make it accessible ensure high quality through a quality culture.

My reference points are the four national and international organisations that I have had the pleasure of serving:
NADE – Norwegian Association for Distance and Flexible Education www.nade-nff.no
EDEN – European Distance and E-learning Network http://www.eden-online.org
ICDE – International Council for Open and Distance Education www.icde.org

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EFQUEL – European Foundation for Quality in E-learning http://www.qualityfoundation.org

EFQUEL is a fairly young membership organization. We are pleased to have the UOC as a member and I see several other members in the audience. EFQUEL enhances the quality of e-learning in Europe by providing services for members and support for all stakeholders.

Quality through dialogue

Let me draw your attention to a recently published book, ***Managing Technology in Higher Education***, written by Dr Albert Sangrà from the UOC and Dr Tony Bates. http://batesandsangra.ca

In chapter six they say:
"Quality assurance methods are valuable for accreditation agencies concerned about institutions using e-learning to cut corners or reduce costs without maintaining standards.

They can be useful for providing instructors new to teaching with technology, or struggling with its use, with models of best practice to follow.

However, the best guarantees of quality in e-learning are a commitment by the leadership to supporting innovation in teaching, instructors well trained in both pedagogy and the use of technology for teaching, highly qualified and professional learning technology support staff, adequate resources (especially regarding instructor:student ratios), appropriate methods of working (teamwork, project management), and systematic evaluation.

Generally, the same standards that apply to online learning should also apply to face-to-face teaching."

The authors also give some recommendations. Here is their recommendation no. 9:
"*Use standard methods of program approval, review and evaluation, slightly adapted for the special circumstances of online learning.*

Ensure that learner support is provided in suitable ways for off-campus students.

Use a team approach, with instructional designers and web support staff, and best practice in online course design, for hybrid and distance courses.

Ensure that the course design is adapted to meet the needs of off-campus learners.

Begin applying some of these techniques to the re-design of large face-to-face classes."

To illustrate my point about focus on the learner I would like to present three examples from Norway. They represent different types of learners, none of them very much interested in ranking, but concerned about quality. The first one is a lady, the head of a school, who has a degree as a teacher and wanted to learn more about managing and being a leader. After finishing her course at the University of Bergen, she said, "I could never have accomplished my master's degree without the possibility to study via e-learning." She is a typical type of student.

Another example is Marte Baade. She is almost blind, she wanted to become an assistant in a kindergarten and she used distance-education, e-learning methods at NKI to acquire the knowledge that she needed and she passed her exam with very good results. In 2010 she was awarded the NADE prize as the best e-learning student of the year. Students with special needs are a second category.

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Mathis Persen Bongo represents a third category. In northern Norway we have an indigenous population called Sami people. Many of them earn their living by having large flocks of reindeer. Equipped with mobile phones and computers, Mathis Persen Bongo from the Sámi University College has given reindeer herders an opportunity to pursue higher education while herding reindeer. For that he was in 2010 named the online teacher of the year in Norway.

These three students represent three categories: ordinary students wanting new knowledge, students with special needs and the third one addressing a special field that is very suitable for the use of e-learning. The examples are from Norway where we have a very good education system and where still many use e-learning. When you look at this in a global context, we can just imagine the potential.

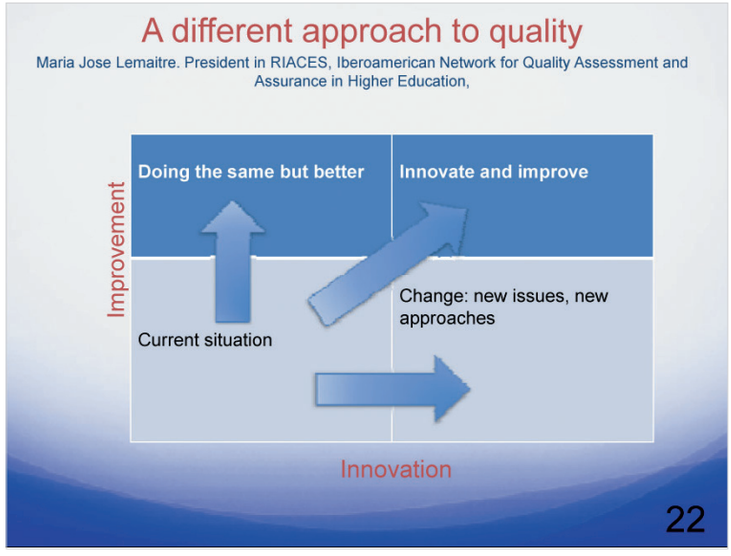
All three of these students actively use the social web in their learning. How can we ensure quality with the new forms of learning? How can we be sure that through the use of open educational resources and open educational practices we offer quality education? The rapid technological changes affect technology-enhanced education in our ways of learning and consequently our teaching methods. How does that influence our quality thinking?

We want to ensure quality and we want to improve. How can these objectives be cobined? Let me quote from an OECD publication, ***Quality assurance in Tertiary Eduction: Current Practices in OECD Countries***,." published by Viktoria Kis in August 2005 www.oecd.org/edu/tertiary/review

"Quality assurance procedures can serve two major purposes: improvement and accountability.

But there is an uneasy balance between those two."

María José Lemaitre, President of RIACES, the Iberoamerican Network for Quality Assessment and Assurance in Higher Education, gives a good illustration of another dilemma when striving for quality.



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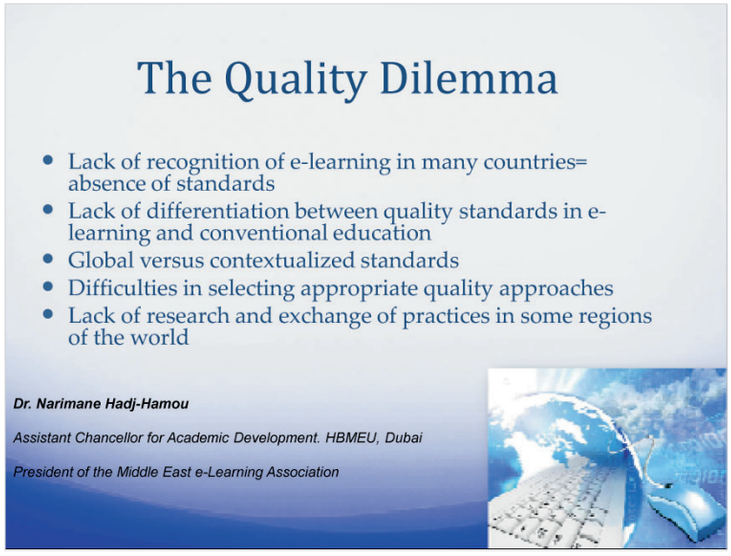
Down on the left, we have the current situation. We want to improve – go up – doing the same but better, but we also want to innovate. How do we combine improvement and innovation?

Dr Narimane Hadj-Hamou, President of the Middle-East e-Learning Association, describes in the next slide the quality dilemma, which is interesting in relation to the quality agencies. Lack of recognition of e-learning in many countries, absence of standards; lack of differentiation between quality standards in e-learning and conventional education; global versus contextualized standards; difficulties in selecting appropriate quality approaches; lack of research and exchange of practices in some regions of the world.



The context

The European University Association (EUA) has been instrumental in developing quality awareness in higher education in general without addressing technology-enhanced learning specifically. Nevertheless some of their reflections on quality can be applied to our field as well.

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Context sensitive; developmental approach; inclusive; engaging all key actors; partnerships between higher-education institutions and agencies for growth; allow risk taking and failure. When we want to improve we have to dare to fail and take risks without being punished or becoming afraid of trying another way. And we must share experiences in quality assurance. I really agree with the European University Association on that.

In 2010 the EUA published the results of an enquiry about the guidelines on quality assurance developed by ENQUA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. How do people from different universities at different levels consider the guidelines? The concern for students' benefits is interesting.

At EFQUEL's innovation Forum in 2010, we touched upon some of the same factors when discussing how to create a quality culture.

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When presenting a project on educational resources and practises (OPAL), Gráinne Conole asked in her key-note: "What are the quality implications in an increasingly open context?" What does it mean for us?

The three recommendations from the forum were:
confidence culture, we have to be able to fail, we have to have trust leadership policy support

The theme in 2011 was, "Certify the Future? Accreditation, Certification and Internationalisation." From the background document: *"While accreditation and certification becomes increasingly important in all educational sectors, it is changing. Has it played its role as guard to make education and training foolproof in the past? We can see that certification of education and training is more and more striving to award educational organizations achievements to turn towards innovation and excellence. How will the certification look like in 2025 or even further in 2050?"*

Some models for quality assurance

UNIQUE is the result of different EU projects. It is a methodology for implementing quality enhanced learning system-wide throughout an institution. After having been a project UNIQUE is now offered by EFQUEL on behalf of the different partners EFMD-CEL, EUROPACE and MENON to traditional universities. It is a clear, standardized, and transparent system for evaluation.

The methodology starts with an inquiry. If an institution or a university wants to apply for UNIQUE certification or have a closer look at it, they go through a formal process that starts with a submission of an application data form. This allows for a preliminary assessment of the university's quality in comparison with the UNIQUE quality criteria. If they are found to be eligible, the process for quality improvement and certification starts with self-assessment and peer review. Institutions that have gone through this process, under UNIQUE, state that the process is more important in a way than the final results. The questions in these self-assessment documents stimulate awareness of the different quality aspects of the use of technology-enhanced learning in their institution.

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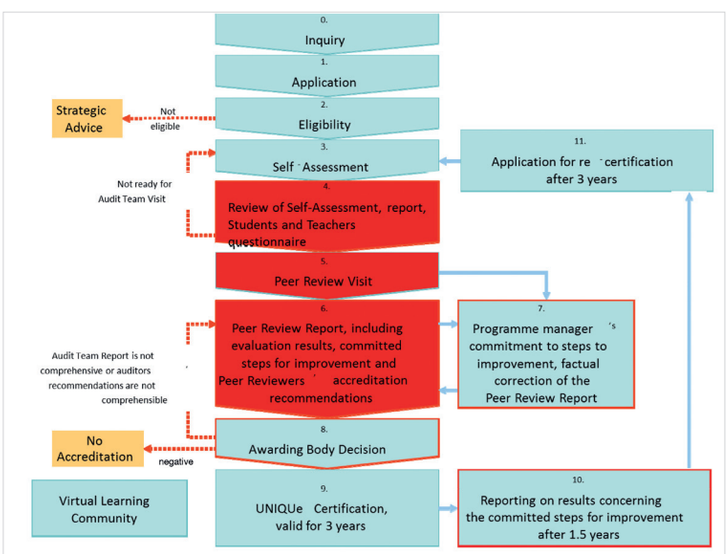
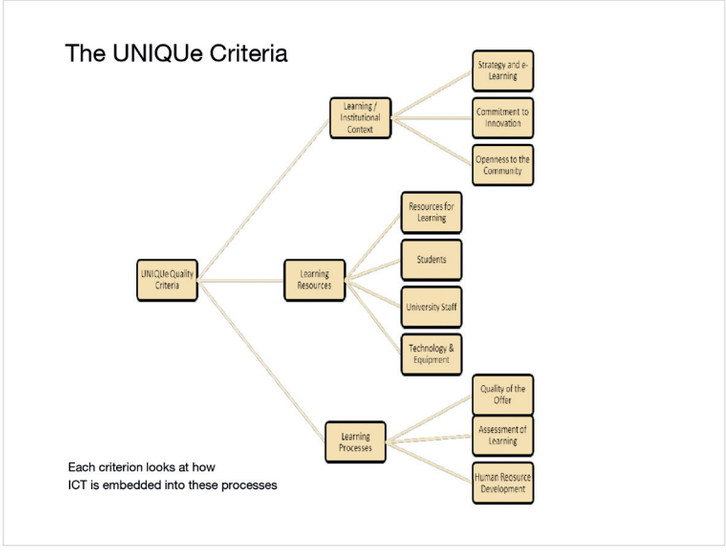
The self-assessment is both for students, teachers, management, and technology staff. A report is being produced. After the self-assessment period, there is a peer review visit by trained reviewers. There is a two- or three-day visit to the institution where they interview people on all levels. The review has the nature of a dialogue. Finally there's a report that goes to the awarding body and the institution gets a certification, or not, or the status of "candidate for certification". One important outcome is that the institutions are given advice on how to develop further. At the moment there are about fifteen universities from Spain, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United Kingdom and Finland that have been given the UNIQUE certification.





Technology-enhanced learning should be part of the strategy of the institution.
The learning resources are for students, university staff, technology and equipment. The learning processes examine quality of the offer, assessment of learning and human-resource development. UNIQUE has a holistic approach to quality within the universities.

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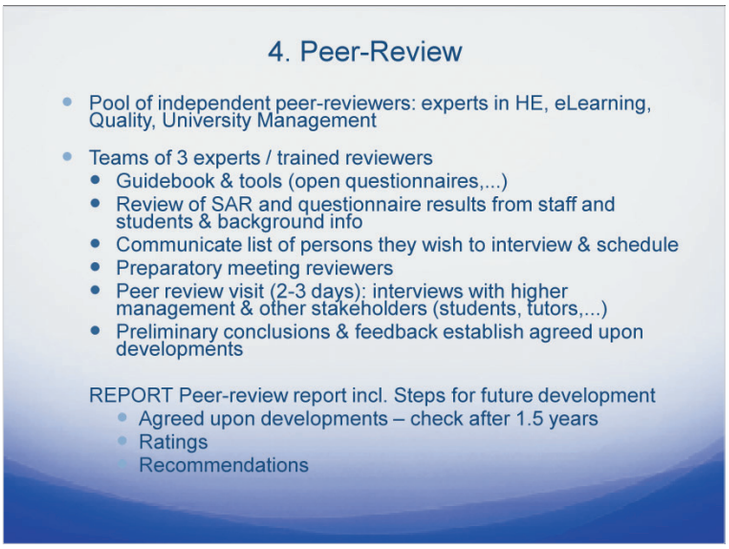
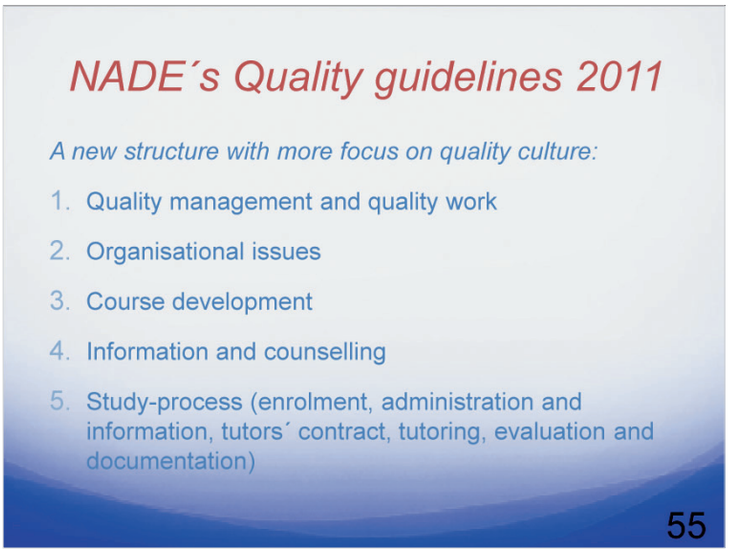


A case study from Norway

The Norwegian Association for Distance and Flexible Education (NADE) was founded in 1968. One of the five important points that the founding fathers of NADE made was the importance of quality. We have a long tradition of distance education in Norway and from the very start quality has been at the top of the agenda. NADE was asked by the Ministry of Education to develop quality guidelines for the independent distance-education institutions. Now NADE has members from sectors like universities, university colleges and business schools, and they also apply these quality standards. The guidelines have been revised many times and adapted also to the wider, broader range of providers.



There is a new version now with five different areas: quality management and quality work; organisational issues; course development; information and counselling; and the study process. Very often when quality-assurance systems are presented they only look at course development and the student-teacher relationship, but here the guidelines cover the whole system.

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Final thoughts

Some final thoughts from my part. Let us move from inspection to inspiration and stimulate the development of a quality culture, and encourage dialogue between accreditation bodies and distance-education practitioners. Technology-enhanced learning ought to be integrated in the recommendations for quality assurance in universities. Distance education, technology-enhanced learning must be accepted as an integral part of the ordinary educational system. We should put more focus on quality in the social web. Finally remember to keep the students' needs in mind, use technology to the benefit of learning and make it accessible, and ensure high quality through a quality culture.

Thank you very much.

Online Universities and Benchmarking Through Rankings

Ben Sowter
(Head of Division, QS Intelligence)

Ben Sowter is head of the QS Intelligence Unit, the team behind the QS World University Rankings®. Mr. Sowter has has personally visited over 100 universities covered in the study and has spoken about the rankings in over 20 countries. He has led the design and delivery of the rankings since their inception in 2004 and, a keen student of the discipline, has become well-known as a world expert on university rankings and evaluation, particularly where applied across borders. He was formerly the UK national president of the international student charity AIESEC. Ben Sowter graduated from the University of Nottingham with a degree in computer science.

Good morning, everyone. And thank you very much for getting up for a second day of this. Hopefully we'll keep it relatively relevant and interesting. This is my second time in Barcelona in recent months. I was kindly invited to the UOC earlier this year to talk a little bit about what we do and all that it entails. I think one of the overriding pieces of feedback to that presentation from some of those there was, "Well, what does this mean to us? We're an online university and you aren't really talking about online universities." Well, that was a very good point and well taken, so I will try not to spend too much time this morning talking about what we've already done and spend more of it talking about what we might do that is more pertinent to the topic of this presentation.

So just by way of background, this is QS's mission statement. We have been around since 1990 operating education fairs, publications to help international students make better choices, and we've been conducting research, in some form, beginning with employer research, for the whole of that time, "to enable motivated people around the world to achieve their potential by fostering international mobility, educational achievement and career development." Now the rankings and evaluations fit into this mission by providing a source of data to help internationally mobile students, hopefully, make more informed decisions.

I often like to begin my presentations with this quote from the former director of LSE: "I imagine that all university heads broadly share my own view of these league tables: they are terrific and unquestioned when you score well and better than last time, but fatally flawed and fundamentally unfair when you move in the opposite direction." And this is a typical reaction from the leader of a university [which has] been featured in these league tables since they began at a domestic level, I imagine. It's very popular for such individuals to publicly decry rankings and league tables and then go back to their institution and instruct their marketing division to put it on the homepage of their website and make sure that every prospective international applicant knows that they're number 3 or number 7 or number 18 or number 62, or whatever it happens to be this year. Similarly, this quote also sums up something else, and that is that rankers around the world, such as we

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might call ourselves, are not capturing everything there is to know that is important about a university. And it doesn't matter what ranking you talk about. Our ranking at a global level is comparatively simple, embracing just six indicators. Clearly, it doesn't get to a lot of what universities do. But even the most sophisticated multidimensional ranking systems that are out there, whilst they're a lot more comprehensive and look at a lot more factors, they themselves wouldn't claim to be able to capture everything there is that makes a university good or great. We do our best.

There are some key challenges in developing a ranking. These are challenges that were there when we developed ours, these are challenges that will be there for any organisation that decides to take on the challenge of developing something that might be more applicable in the area of e-learning and distance learning.

First of all, let's have a clear purpose: what and whom is the ranking for? Are we designing this for governments to make better funding decisions, for students to make better institution selection decisions, for other universities to make better partnership decisions, or for faculty members to make better employment decisions? Let's try and begin with a good list. For the vast majority of rankings methodologies that have ever been put forward or devised, it is impractical to conduct them for all 20,000 institutions that exist in the world, and therefore some way of shortlisting and getting down to a manageable number has to take place. We need to identify relevant indicators and define a strong yet practical methodology. I've been in many rooms like this where people put up their hands and say, "Why aren't you taking into account this factor, or that factor?" And I say, "Well, because you're the only country in the world that can supply that data. And whilst if I was devising a national methodology for your country it might make obvious sense to include a particular indicator, because we can't gather data for that on a global level it's not practical to embrace it."

Methodologies need to be presented in a clear and transparent fashion and be directed to quickly. Users of a ranking need to be informed quickly and transparently about what it is that's being measured by that ranking before they are led to believe that it has any authority at all. Data definitions need to be specified, and we've learned this the hard way. In 2004 we thought, "Well, let's go and ask universities how many faculties they've got." Some of them said, "Seven: the faculty of science, the faculty of engineering, the faculty..." and so on. Some gave us a full-time head count. Some gave us a full-time equivalent number. Some gave us a total number. And drawing those all together to get any degree of comparability is quite difficult. Our definitions have been iterated through eight years of doing this and every year we still come across a university somewhere that raises some question that some loophole or sub-clause in one of our definitions has to be added to capture as we move forward.

We need to collect complete and accurate data, and this is more difficult than it might sound. We need to present the results transparently and clearly. And ideally one of the Berlin Principles – I don't know if they were mentioned yesterday – is to try and identify different types of institutions, and perhaps this aspect is an area where global rankings such as ours are weakest, and it's also an area that is most pertinent to the topic of today's discussion.

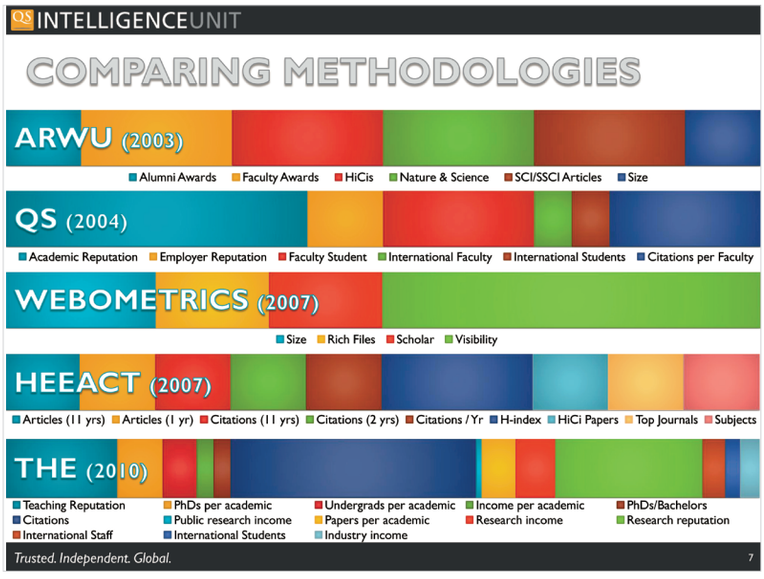
So our approach, in brief, to how we do this for traditional residential universities: we set forth in 2004 to try and give one answer to the question of what is a world-class university. **Research** obviously seems to be an important part of all of these things, perhaps different in the context of online, which I'll come onto later. **Teaching** is a very important part of what universities do. At least the majority of universities that aren't terribly focused on research think that teaching should not be considered merely an inconvenience. **Employability:** For us, talking to students, for the majority of them, this is the number one reason they are going to university in the first place. Most of them don't expect to go on to masters and PhD programmes and see out their days in academia. They expect to come out the other side and to have been equipped with something that helps them get a bigger, better, faster, more desirable job. And **internationalisation**: increasingly, higher education is globalising to reflect the backdrop against which it's set, and leading institutions need to take this seriously.

Online Universities and Benchmarking Through Rankings

by Ben Sowter

Our approach is to base a large proportion of this on two significant surveys, one of academics. In 2011 we drew on over 33,000 academic responses around the world to form 40% of our overall assessment. We drew on almost 17,000 employers to contribute a further 10% of our assessment. And we look at the faculty-student ratio as a traditional proxy for commitment to teaching; the proportion of international faculty and proportion of international students to get at how international a university looks; and finally a more traditional measure of research output, citations per faculty, makes up the final 20%. This methodology has now been in place since 2005. In our first year we didn't get enough employer response to include that indicator so it was introduced in our second year. And this makes it the second-most-established global ranking of universities after the Shanghai Jiao Tung approach that emerged in 2003.

So let's look at what other people are doing.



This is a brief chronology. The top chart maps out the Shanghai methodology, the academic ranking of world universities. The first two measures relate to Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals. Then we have highly cited authors, publications in ***Nature*** and ***Science***, citations in the Science Citation Index and Social Science Citation Index, and finally all of the above divided by the number of faculty to make some adjustment for the size of an institution.

QS I've just introduced so I won't go over again.

The next one is Webometrics and I'll come back to this a little bit later. Webometrics is really more of a ranking of universities' capability to tell the world about themselves online than it is of their actual activity directly. That means that it has a dramatic emphasis on English language. The UK and the US dominate their top results, despite the fact that they are produced out of Spain. The first is size, not of the institution but of the institution's Website, the number of pages, rich files, the number of Word documents, PowerPoint presentations, PDFs. The supposition is that a proportion of this is likely to be research-oriented, and institutions with an open policy to access their research will do well. Scholar is based on the number of records it finds in the Google Scholar database, and finally the 50% indicator is based on visibility, as defined by the number of other websites linking to the website of the institution in question. This is often dismissed, particularly when anybody is talking about a ranking of the world's leading institutions, but where it sets itself apart is in its applicability and its inclusiveness. It looks at over 20,000 institutions around the world and produces results tables on 12,000, so

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institutions that are way outside the radar for Shanghai, for QS, for Times Higher Education, can find records and some basis for comparison, however quirky they may think it, in this context. This is an epidemic in Africa, for example. Universities are setting up entire divisions dedicated to improving their Webometrics ranking because it's the only ranking being conducted globally that's likely to apply itself to an institution in Nigeria, for example. So, for the top institutions maybe it is not so interesting, but when we're looking at institutions as a whole around the world, it has its place.

HEEACT is the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan, and they have come up with a counterpoint to the Shanghai ranking, really, which avoids some of the statistical shortfalls of Nobel prizes and Fields medals by blending medium-term and short-term bibliometric measures. So it's looking purely at research, again.

And then finally in 2010 Times Higher Education came out with their new temporary methodology. They are adjusting this considerably again for their 2011 ranking, which is due to come out in two weeks' time, I think. But last year there were 13 measures, not all of which were published in full, but again using a significant placement for reputation (including asking academics about the quality of teaching in other institutions) and a number of financial measures, which exchange rates may have an influence on, which will be interesting to see when the new results come out this year. They published a 200 that's been very well read and referenced and deserves a mention in this context.

There are others, and this is not an exhaustive list. There's the URAP ranking that came out of the Middle East Technical University. There's a ranking that came out of Russia with a relatively complex methodology that put MIT in first place. You look down the list and Harvard was in sixth place, unusually low in comparison with some of these, and one place behind Moscow State University, in fifth place.

QS INTELLIGENCEUNIT

COMPARING RESULTS

	ARWU	QS	Webometrics	HEEACT	THE
1	Harvard	Cambridge	MIT	Harvard	Harvard
2	Stanford	Harvard	Harvard	Stanford	Caltech
3	MIT	MIT	Stanford	Johns Hopkins	MIT
4	Berkeley	Yale	Cornell	Washington	Stanford
5	Cambridge	Oxford	Berkeley	UCLA	Princeton
6	Caltech	Imperial	Michigan	Berkeley	Cambridge
7	Princeton	UCL	Wisconsin	MIT	Oxford
8	Columbia	Chicago	Washington	Michigan	Berkeley
9	Chicago	U Penn	Minnesota	Toronto	Imperial
10	Oxford	Columbia	U Penn	Oxford	Yale
	15 August 2011	5 September 2011	July 2011	15 September 2010	16 September 2010

Trusted. Independent. Global. 8

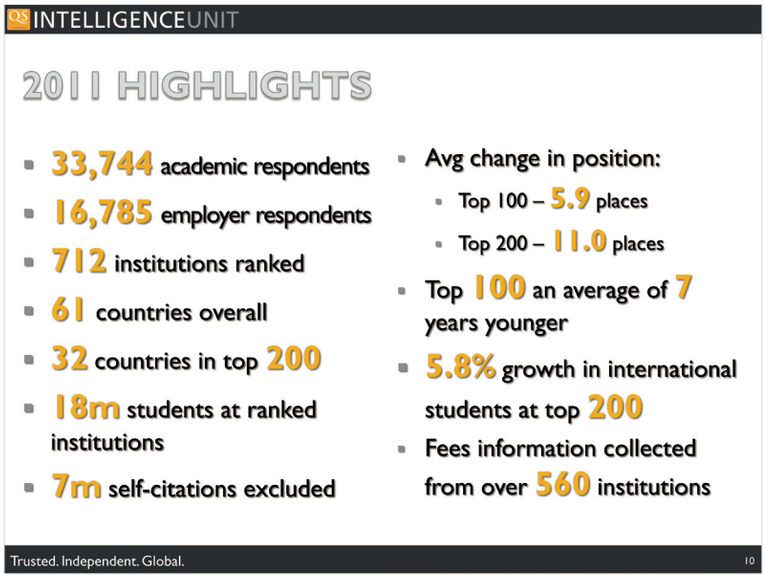
In France a ranking has been produced that's called something like the Professional Ranking of World Universities and is based on the number of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies that are alumni of each institution and prompted the *Financial Times* headline "French do well in French ranking." And all these things do is highlight that it's important for all of these, and not just those where the agenda is perhaps obvious, but for all of these, for people to take them pragmatically and actually look up what the measures are before they draw conclusions about the validity of the results.

Online Universities and Benchmarking Through Rankings *by Ben Sowter*

So comparing results across these five, the two on the right are shaded in because I haven't seen the new 2011 results for those ones yet. But what we can see is that a lot of the top names are the top names no matter what methodology you try to apply to universities. There's a degree of agreement, no matter what measure you choose, about what the world's leading institutions are: Harvard appears in all lists, MIT appears in all lists, Oxford and Cambridge tend to be the leading institutions outside the US, and that's true even where they don't appear in the top 10.

This was a nice comment about our work: "Though of course we recognise the limitations of all league-table methodologies, we greatly value QS for the clarity and quality of the data we use and the stability, which enables us to see and understand trends over time. This we think gives your rankings a comparative advantage and considerable authority." The concept of viewing trends over time is an interesting one and it's a paradox that we face every year when we look at statistical refinements to some of the things that we do. Do we make improvements to the rankings, because obviously we have critics like others and there's a call to improve things, or do we leave things the way they are because people want to be able to compare consistently over time? It's a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't approach, and depending on the room I'm in, I'm damned the minute I walk in the door anyway. So we learn to live with that and balance things. The reality of things is that rankings have clearly got their critics. They cause a storm of debate every year when they're released and a number of institution heads saying, "These are rubbish, these are a waste of time," a number of other institution heads saying, "Well, actually, I can see some value in this, this gives me some way to measure my performance, to track the improvement of that performance over time."

Some highlights for our 2011 results, which were released just three weeks ago.



There were record responses to our surveys, which we're really happy with. It's a persistent area of curiosity for universities that are involved. "Well, you're doing a survey. How many people are actually involved in that, and is it representative?" Well, a lot of people are involved in that and in general terms it is increasingly representative from a geographical basis as well: 712 institutions ranked this year, 61 countries included amongst those, and 32 countries featured in our top 200. We calculate that there are approximately 18 million students at institutions ranked in our system. This year for the first time we excluded self-citations from our citations analysis. That represented 7 million citations that we excluded from our analysis. They're more stable than ever, with an average change in position of less than six places in the top 100. And interestingly,

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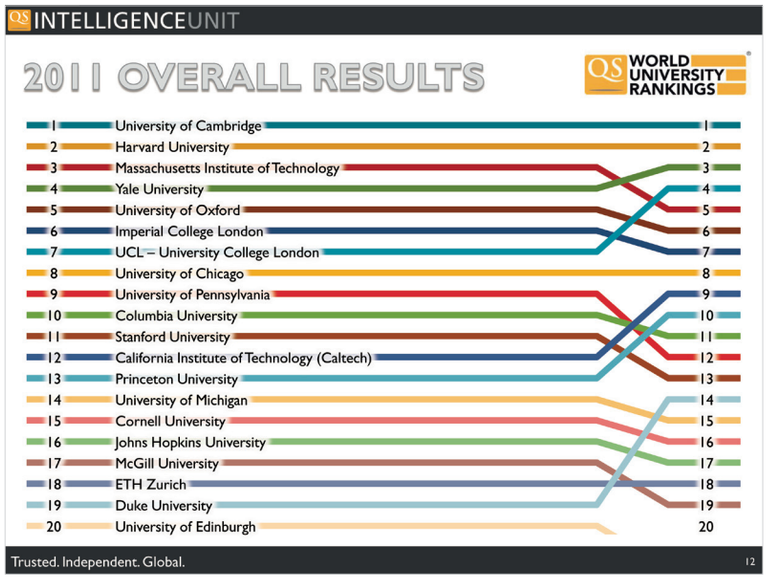
the top 100 universities have got an average of seven years younger than they were a year ago. I don't think someone in a university somewhere has discovered the fountain of youth, I think the reality is that we do have a system which doesn't purely measure traditional success, and up-and-coming institutions do do reasonably well in certain quarters in our rankings. There's also a 5.8% growth in international students at the top 200 universities, a number which is remarkably similar to the number recently reported by the OECD in terms of growth. And this year we've also collected fees information from over 560 of the 712 institutions and published that alongside the results, as obviously tuition fees and tuition-fee reform has been such an important issue in the international press, particularly in countries like the UK and all of those countries that might seek to benefit from the introduction of higher fees in the UK. These are the top 20 institutions.



Largely there's been a little bit of movement. The MIT has done well. Cambridge stayed in first place this year. The University of Edinburgh is a new entry to the top 20 coming up from about 24th. But broadly it's the usual suspects in a slightly different order.

So, one question that John posed to me was, "Well, what do universities get out of being ranked?" and I think different universities would say different things. Certainly it's high-profile validation and recognition. The question of not knowing what you don't know from an international-student perspective I think is an important one. And I can highlight an example. This year for the first time we published discipline tables in 26 separate disciplines, one of which was philosophy. Now, a good contact of ours at Ohio State University is married to a philosophy professor who told her, "These rankings are rubbish. Rutgers is one of the leading philosophy programmes in the US, and these guys have only got them in at 17th." To which my response was, "Well, who outside the US knew that Rutgers was one of the top three philosophy programmes in the US?" And the fact that a lot of people outside of the US might now know that Rutgers is one of the top 20 philosophy programmes in the world might be seen as telling people something they didn't already know. So from a certain perspective, from the view of prospective international students, when they're looking down a ranking table, they're probably familiar, and they probably have them roughly in the right order, the universities in their own country. "Yeah, Cambridge, Oxford, I expect those to be up there, maybe Bristol, Warwick, Edinburgh, yeah, they're a good university." But as soon as they start thinking about, even the US, yes, they might have heard of Harvard... and also other countries, do they know what the best universities are? And these guys are 18 years old. They're considering studying in an overseas country. They've got no idea, necessarily, apart from their local universities, which ones are good and which ones are bad, and rankings potentially serve to help them know a little something that they didn't already know.

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It's an independent assessment. Increasingly we've heard from universities frustrations that other universities have had the audacity to use the same language as them in their international marketing materials: "cutting-edge", "world-leading", you know, these kinds of terms that are used by all sorts of universities and probably justifiably, but they're a little bit homogenous and they are the company line of the institution in question. Rankings and separate valuations can be independent. They're certainly good for using in international marketing. I once saw somebody from Hong Kong University of Science and Technology get up at a conference and list all of their international rankings. And it was a rankings conference, so he felt like he could be frank with us. He put up all the ones that they use in their marketing messages, and then he said, ***(whispering)*** "And here's the ones we don't talk about." Obviously, for international marketing, institutions tend to choose the ones in which they fare well and conveniently overlook the ones which they don't fare so well in, and that's exactly the right thing to do. It's about looking at the measures, much as I was saying before, that the rankings look at, and choosing the ones that reflect the things that you consider important. Hopefully an institution is more likely to consider the things important that they do well at and therefore it's not necessarily inappropriate to choose the rankings in which they do well to wear on their sleeve.

It raises awareness globally of institutions and the whole decision-making process, the whole concept that there are options. For UK students, when I went to university, you didn't even think that universities existed outside England. And I said England very specifically. Over the last fifteen years or so since all that took place, certainly you've become aware of Scotland and Wales and Ireland, and more recently, obviously, students of that age have begun to cast a net further. The Netherlands have been actively marketing in the UK to pick up students who are scared about the tuition fees or not getting places at UK universities, and increasingly the UK over the next five to ten years is likely to become a rich source market for international students instead of continuing to be the traditional destination market that it has been for many years.

There's a rudimentary benchmarking benefit to rankings. For the first time, in some cases, in 2003 and 2004, institutions who may have been complacent about their leading position in their own country suddenly discovered that maybe they weren't as good as they thought they were, and they'd got some basis to look at that.

Rankings recognise excellence. They don't necessarily recognise ***all*** excellence, in all its shapes and forms, but they do recognise excellence and increasingly as international partnerships become important, universities are using them to identify appropriate partners and to frame the inquisition around selecting those partners.

Now, this sort of material was probably shared yesterday and in pretty much every other rankings event that there's been. This comes from the World Development Indicators, which probably means it's OECD-UNESCO data in its original form, but what we can see is that over the last ten years there's a dramatic increase in tertiary enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment. So take out population expansion, take out all of these other things that are other causes for growth. As a percentage of everybody enrolling in education, a larger proportion are enrolling in tertiary education than ever. And I'm not very good at taking notes, so I miss whose quotes I'm supposed to be using and whose statistics I'm supposed to be using, but at the UNESCO forum on rankings in May in the closing it was [said] that global demand for higher education would peak in the middle of the next decade at something like a hundred and something million more places than are expected now, and it was estimated that in order to meet that demand we would have to establish a new university of about 30,000 students every fortnight until that point in time. The simple reality is that an alternative solution has to be found. And it is impossible for even the most fundamentally uneducated on the subject not to conclude that technology and the provision of distance and online learning is in some future form the solution to that problem.

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I like to share this because it's pretty and it moves around. This is a system called Gapminder produced out of the Karolinska Institute by a very charismatic academic called Hans Rosling. I encourage you to look him up. I've never seen anybody quite so enthusiastic about statistics. And essentially he got bored with tables and decided that there were better ways to present statistics. All this work is based on UNESCO and OECD underlying data, and essentially it enables us to see how the world has changed. On this chart I've plotted income per person on the horizontal axis, inflation-adjusted GDP per capita, and we can see in 1800 that there are very few countries in the world with a GDP per capita of more than $2,000. On the vertical axis is life expectancy at birth, so this says something about lifespan, about healthcare. And we can see that there is no country in the world with an average life expectancy at birth of more than forty. It gives me five or six years. You can hover over these countries usually and see what they are. This is the UK, the Netherlands, and we can play the picture over time and see what's happened to the world in the last 200 years. The reality is that not much happened for the first 50 of them. Not a great deal happened in the second half of the last century, either, although things begin to move in Europe, which are the orange countries. Then we go into the 20th century, things begin to get a little bit crazy, and here come India and China, the big red and blue, the great leap forward days. And into the last half of the 20th century and into the 21st we can see that there are no countries in the world with a life expectancy at birth less than forty. And only Africa dominates the countries with an income per person below $2,000.

So the world has changed quite dramatically. And this has had all sorts of implications. There was a UK documentary recently hosted by Sir David Attenborough in which he said, "The population of the planet has trebled in my lifetime." Some of this might be quite scary to some of these political folks that perhaps are choosing not to look at population expansion, as it would be rather unpopular. However, how does this influence education and higher education specifically? Well, I think India and China are particularly interesting in that each of them have got over a billion people. And in both of those countries families are smaller and incomes are higher and cultural ambition for their children is considerable. What do they want to do? Well, for every generation that didn't go to college, they want their children to go to college. For every generation who did go to college, they want their children to go to a better college. For every generation who went to a good college, they want their children to go to a leading international college. As a result, we see dramatic increases in demand for higher education and dramatic increases in demand for international higher education. I think it was mentioned yesterday, I was going to do a pop quiz on whether anybody in the room happened to know the world's largest university by student enrolment. And when I started looking at this question, I assumed it was going to be the University of Buenos Aires or the National University of Mexico. But no. It's Indira Gandhi National University in India, with over 3.3 million enrolled students. And guess what? They're not all turning up on campus. It's a distance learning institution.

In this landscape, universities are not slow to pick up on the fact that there's money to be had from prospective international students, there's demand to be met, there's government funding to pick up. And they are marketing. They are sending messages to prospective students through Twitter, through building campuses on Second Life, through Facebook. However many other thousands of social networks might be most appropriate to the individual target market. They're still producing more paper than ever in brochures, in posters, they're turning up at education fairs, they're hiring agents. You go around an average Indian city and there are dozens of Western universities that have offices that they probably don't even know about themselves above shops in high streets in Bangalore and Chandigarh. What's a student to do? All of these universities firing messages at them no doubt telling them that they're world-leading and they've got cutting-edge facilities and they're the only place that that individual should consider going. Well, inevitably they're going to start looking for comparative information. They're going to start looking for rankings, they're going to start looking at other evaluations, anything they can find to educate their decision to try and filter out all the noise and get to a reasonable number of choices that they can perhaps do their own research on and make a final decision.

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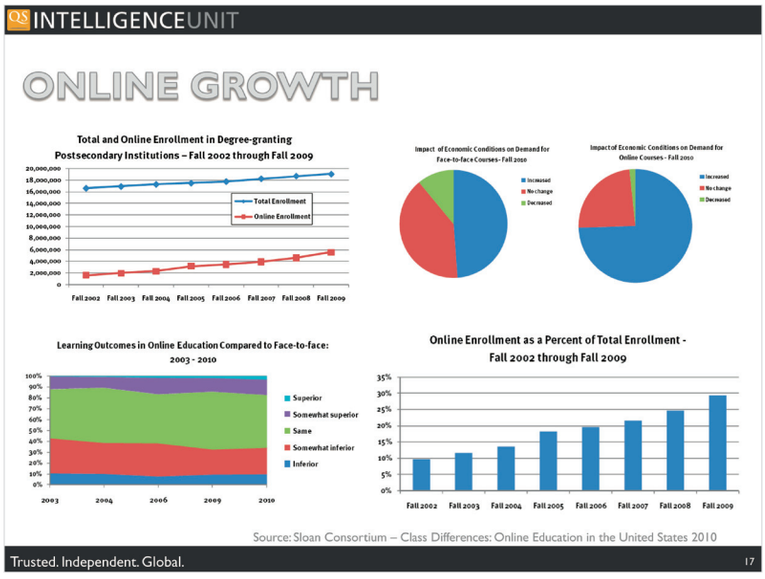
Even in an online space there are an increasing number of providers and – sadly – there are plenty of providers with questionable integrity and quality. Students are asking questions like this: "Which universities have got good reputations with employers? Which universities are best for the degree I want to do? Which are the most trusted online courses? And can I fit a degree around existing commitments?"



Online is growing as a phenomenon. This stuff, I don't know if this came up yesterday. This is from the Sloan Consortium, so unfortunately it looks at the US exclusively, but we are seeing dramatic growth in online enrolment. Something like six million students enrolled in at least one wholly online course in 2009, and it's growing a lot quicker than the growth rate for traditional enrolment. That's the bottom-right chart: online enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment in the US. Also there is some work in the US on learning outcomes of online education compared to face-to-face, largely based on surveys. But the general feeling seems to be improving, that people are beginning to accept that online education can deliver the same or in some cases better learning outcomes than traditional pedagogies.

Sadly, as mentioned, there is an uncertain reputation. When a student considers online, a lot of online providers are younger, are less well-established. They don't carry the same brand provenance as a Harvard or a Cambridge. There are providers out there that are seeing these students as potential cash cows, arguing that because their opportunity costs and cost of living doesn't necessarily need to take as much of a hit, they can afford to pay higher fees to their online provider. As a result there are lawsuits out there aplenty. A quick Google can find plenty of horror stories of people who feel that they've been badly ripped-off by online providers. Things like completion rates for some online providers are very poor, indicating that they are all about getting the student on board but not necessarily about offering them the support they need to get to where they're going. What does this say? Well, it all begins to paint a picture whereby some independent viewpoint on the quality of these providers is going to be increasingly required by the students undertaking them. A ranking, an evaluation, a rating, accreditations, various things, some of which already exist, and students are likely to have an increasing demand for.

I thought it was worth looking at Webometrics again just to look at where some of these universities fare in the one ranking that we can look at that captures them. And this is the picture for a selection of institutions that specialise in online or distance learning.

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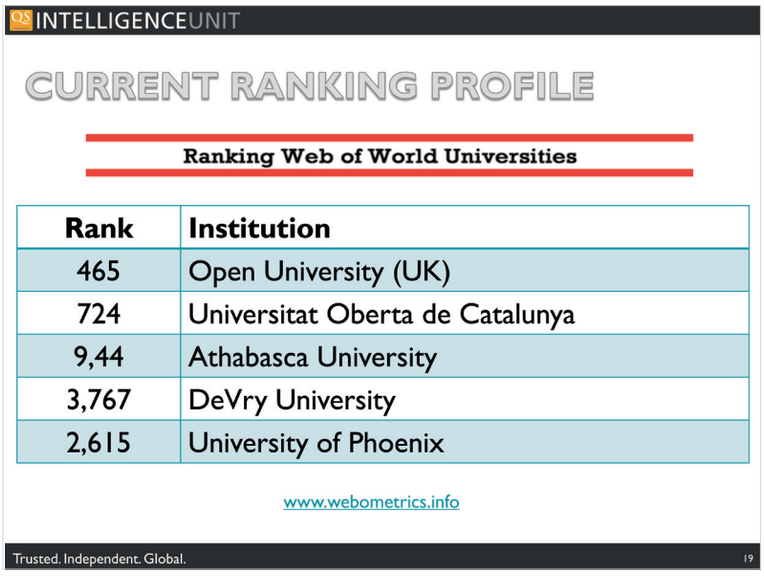

The Open University in the UK is the UK's largest university by enrolment and comes in the top 500 in Webometrics. The UOC comes in at 724 in Webometrics, which, given the natural student-centric nature of these institutions, is quite an achievement. There's not going to be huge volumes of research material found on the UOC's website in comparison with a Harvard or a Cambridge. Athabasca University from Canada – my apologies for the comma, that's slightly unnecessarily placed there – and perhaps two of the most – I'll use the word cautiously – "famous" providers in the US, DeVry and the University of Phoenix, are much lower down in this context, despite their huge marketing budgets and increasing student volumes.

Obviously, perhaps there's no surprise, an online student-centric university will tend to have a lack of focus on research. These are the records in Scopus for DeVry and the UOC. I'm pleased to see that the UOC is fourfold better than DeVry University from a Scopus-documents perspective. Well done. But inevitably the research happening at the UOC is focussed on e-learning specifically. There'll be other things in their conference papers and so forth, and we wouldn't expect a huge volume of records in Scopus for an institution that is student-centric and online. This is a problem for me as a global ranker, because we use research metrics because they're easy, because they're accessible, because we can get them. Shanghai, I imagine, would struggle to find many Nobel prize winners and Fields medallists at universities that are principally focused on online and distance education. So this lack of focus on research almost immediately removes the most dependable international comparators that rankings have been using up until this point, and perhaps puts in even sharper relief that particular weakness of global evaluations.

So there are some potential online indicators. Perhaps we could use some surveys. Well, we like surveys, we've been using them a lot too. But they're fraught with difficulties in their own way, and I think this came up a little bit yesterday, from what I've heard. For instance, Columbia University, they do some great stuff online. But if you ask academics or employers to comment on the reputation of Columbia University, they are not going to be commenting on the reputation of their online activity. They are going to be flavoured by the reputation of the university in its traditional form. So it gets a little bit tricky to isolate the online operation of a traditional university from its traditional operation, which means that you immediately disadvantage an institution that doesn't feature that traditional component.

Research is generally negligible, so Nobel prizes, if we wanted to use them, are probably not a good measure; citations and publications are not likely to be effective measures.

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Completion rates, though – well we've talked about that a little bit – could be a good measure. An online institution that is doing a better job of getting the people that sign up at the beginning to graduate at the end could perhaps be seen as an institution worth a little bit more than one that isn't.

Student diversity is something that speaks to reputation and reach. Is this online institution attracting students from worldwide, just from its own country, or just from its own country and neighbouring countries? So perhaps we could get to something from that.

Length of establishment: I don't think we would use this on an ordinal basis, but maybe we could offer something for older institutions up to a maximum of, say, ten years. I think students are concerned about new institutions popping up in this area that aren't necessarily as accomplished and want to know that there are a number of cohorts of graduated students out there in the world hovering and contributing to their reputation, so something based on length of establishment might work.

We could look at the number/proportion of programmes offered online relative to those offered in traditional formats, up to some maximum cap, really to identify whether or not an institution is taking it seriously, or whether or not it's just a couple of lip-service programmes here and there.

Flexibility is an important thing from our conversations with students. If you're taking a degree online, you want it to have a lot of the advantages that it naturally should have, like I can pick up course materials at any time, anywhere, on any device. I don't necessarily have to be in a fixed place at a fixed time. So that could be taken into account.

Cost, perhaps relative to full-time programmes in the city or country so that we can identify whether institutions are charging fair rates for this. And perhaps things like employment rates that we would use for traditional universities are still very applicable for online institutions, if not more so. Ultimately a student wants to know that their online degree is going to be competitive for them in an employment context, in the same way that they would if they were going physically to campus.

This is not a complete and exhaustive list, and I'm hoping that by the end of today I'll go away with the intention to add a few more to this slide and to our thinking. But there are some options.

A ranking, then. Let's pull all these indicators together and build a nice, pretty, easy-to-understand league table. Well, I'll point out some of the strengths and limitations of that. Rankings are simple, aren't they? To quote a young man in the front row, "Rankings are sexy." And the reason they are sexy is because they are so straightforward. It's so easy to say to your wife, "My university's seven places better than yours." I have to say that before we publish every year I do check the relative positions of Nottingham and Leeds and let my wife know that she's still second-best. Over 50 million people have viewed QS results in the last twelve months. Over a million people have viewed QS results in the last three weeks, since they were published. It provides a very rudimentary basis for benchmarking performance across borders. However, performance is relative to the performance of others. You can get better and do worse in rankings if those around you get better quicker. There's limited data available for rankings globally, so some of those indicators on the previous page we'd have to throw out because we might be able to get them for the UOC and Athabasca, and the University of Phoenix, but could we get them for Indira Gandhi National University in India with 3.3 million enrolled students? I don't know. It would undoubtedly prove more difficult.

Specialist strengths are often overlooked by rankings and it's difficult to capture the diversity of higher-education institutions in whatever subset we look at. So, as we begin to gather data and better metrics, we might be able to produce a ranking, and that would be interesting. However, there's something else that suddenly came to my mind in a brainwave in the last couple of days. We have launched, alongside our rankings this year, a

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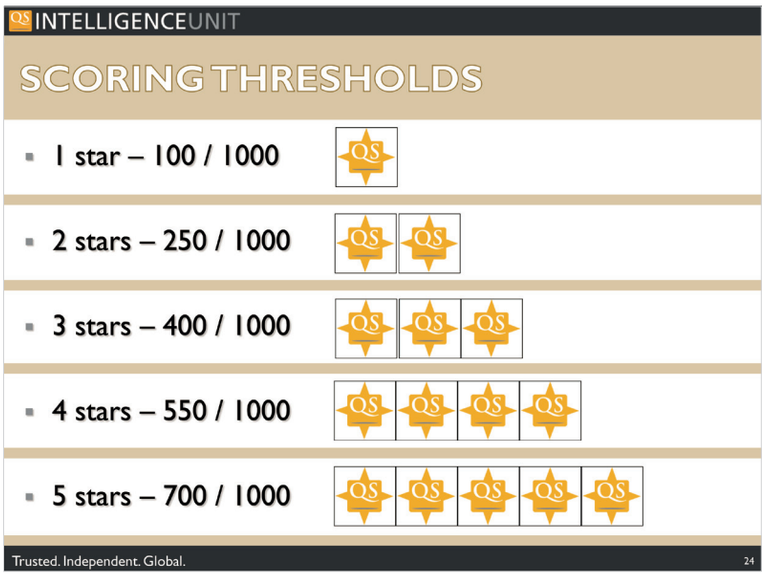
rating system which goes hand in hand with the ranking results called QS Stars. It has some key fundamental differences from a ranking. Performance is not relative to the performance of others. It is not essential for every distance-learning and online programme in the world to be included in order for you to get some results out of this system. We can do them one at a time, we can do them for the institutions that are interested in getting involved, and not do them for the institutions that aren't. It's a broad-based rating system, as it stands, designed to identify, evaluate and recognise universities for their diverse and specialist strengths. It has been our intention from the outset to formulate an adaptive and evolving methodology that will embrace different pedagogies and different typologies of institution. We haven't done that perfectly the first time round; we're going to see requirements for the methodology to evolve, and one direction in which it might evolve is to better reflect the strengths of online institutions.



Essentially, the outcome is a simple star rating much like a Michelin star, perhaps, where an institution can achieve a number of stars based on its performance against a number of indicators. Because it's opt-in, in the existing methodology, we were able to look at a university against more than 30 indicators instead of just the 6 that we've been able to embrace for the rankings themselves.

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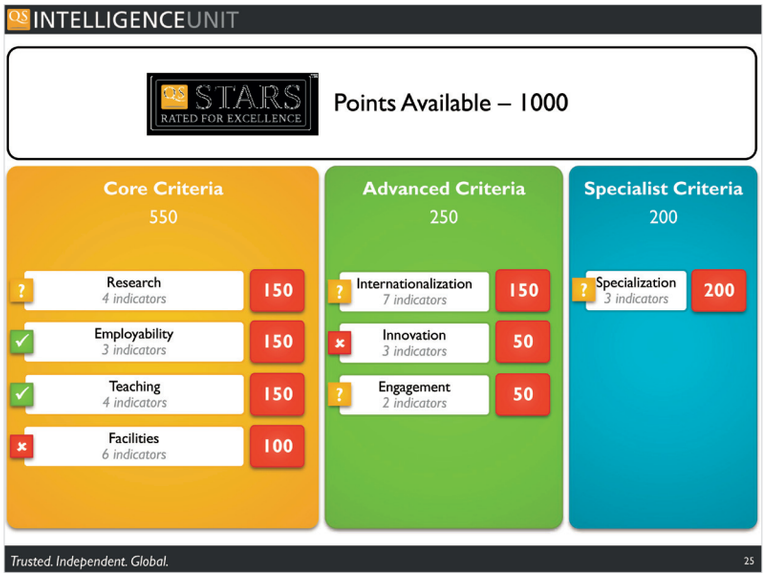
And this is the current picture.



The question marks and checks and crosses are my initial assessment about whether or not these sections of the methodology are currently applicable to an institution that offers the majority of its programmes online or through distance. We still take in research here but, as opposed to the 60% of weight it takes into account in the global context, it's just 15% out of the maximum possible 1,000 points.

We have employability, which looks at provision of career support and reputation with employers and graduate-employment rates, all of which are technically applicable to an online university.

Teaching is extremely important to a respected online university, and the measures we are using there are principally faculty-student ratios and student satisfaction surveys, both of which in their own way ought to be applicable to online programmes.

Now facilities is a bit of a black spot. I haven't met many wholly online universities that have got a rich sporting facility for their remote students, so something would need to be looked at there.

Internationalisation. Some of the measures would have to be tweaked, some of the thresholds adjusted. It's inevitably easier for an online programme to attract students from more than 20 countries than it is a physical institution.

Innovation is looking at things like spinoff companies and patents for technology development, which are not necessarily, in their current form, applicable.
And then engagement looks at community investment, which is possibly difficult for an online programme, but it also looks at scholarship provision which is not necessarily a closed door.

And specialisation looks at specialist strength by subject and accreditations, which can be partly applicable, perhaps.

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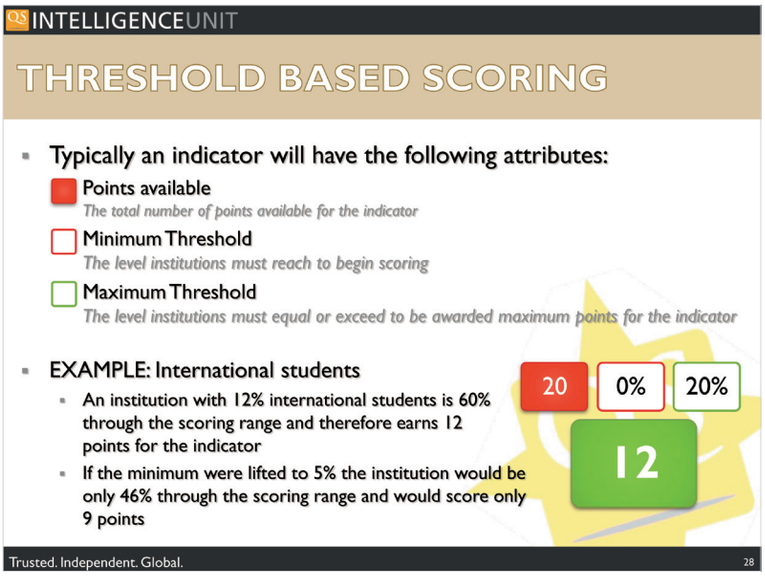
So, going through the existing system before I talk about how we might adjust and adapt some of it, this results in a development roadmap, which gives an institution a clear picture of their performance against each individual measure so that they can break it down. The results are valid for three years, after which we can re-audit and see whether or not the institution has been able to improve its standing. As well as providing an overall stars badge, we also provide a badge in each subcategory of the eight different subcategories, saying that this institution is five stars for employability, for instance, if that happens to be what their five stars are for. The institution can choose whether or not they live off their overall rating or their rating in the individual areas in which they are strongest, which leads to the inevitable reality that there's nothing to stop us doing something like this, whereby a subcategory could be included for online provision and whilst, across the board, the UOC might not be five stars and Harvard might be five stars, we might see that the UOC could very much be five stars for online, and that could be something to help.

The way that this works, in general, is on a threshold-based scoring system.



For each indicator there are a number of points available and a minimum and maximum threshold. For international students, for example, there are 20 points available. There is a minimum threshold of zero, which means that as soon as you have one international student you'll start scoring something, and a maximum threshold of 20%, which means if you've got more than 20% international students it doesn't really matter. This is for the overall system. So an institution with 12% international students is 60% of the way through that range and will ultimately, coincidentally, get 12 points for the indicator. On individual indicators if the thresholds have changed, the scoring range changes.

So let's look at that facilities area. Here's the concept, that we could swap out facilities for a wholly online institution for a range of different indicators which are... This is based, really, on me sitting down with PowerPoint for about three or four hours and thinking, "How on earth can I give these guys something that is relevant?" So it hasn't been through our advisors, it hasn't been through any feedback, it's complete speculation, off-the-top-of-my-head stuff.

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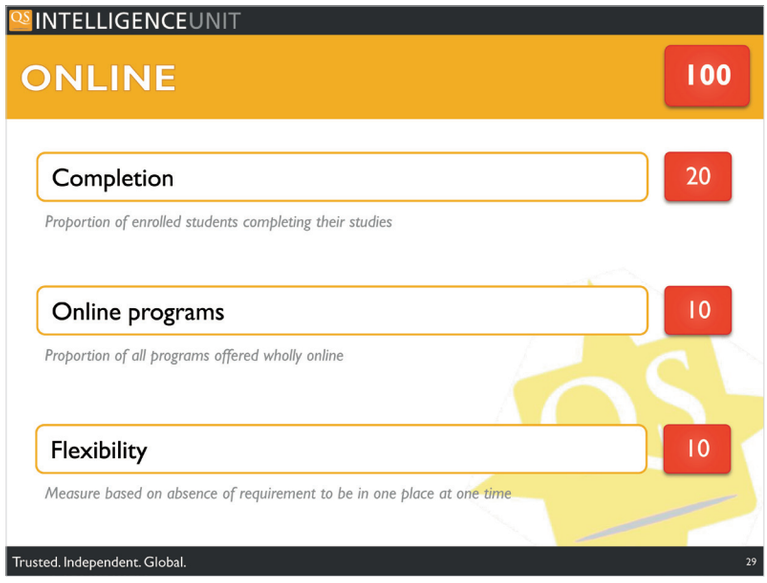
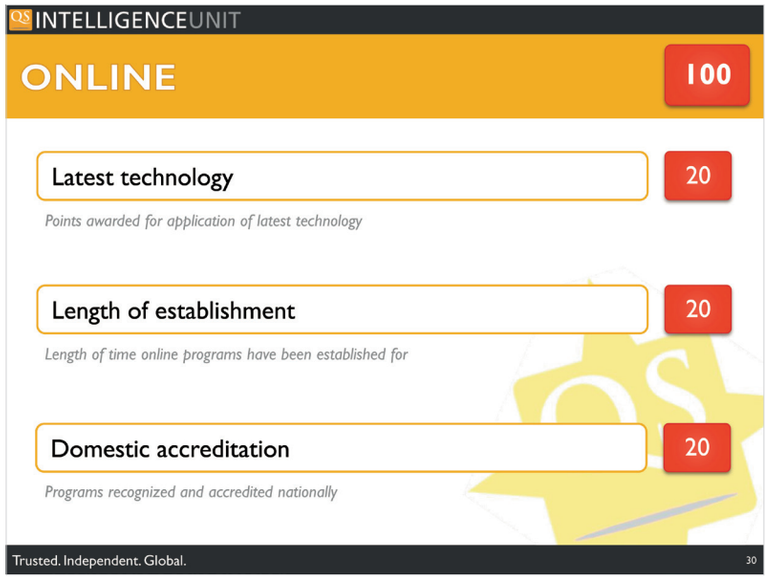


But we could look at the proportion of enrolled students completing their studies. We could assign some weight to that. We could look at the proportion of programmes offered wholly online. Obviously this would give an advantage to an institution that is purely online over one that is blended or offering different kinds of programmes perhaps, but the latter could still score. Flexibility, some measure based on… For instance, we've looked at a lot of programmes that require people to be at one particular thing in the week, or at one meeting a term, and then there are other programmes that are completely flexible.



Use of latest technology. I'm not quite sure how we would capture this, but I think there is a responsibility for institutions in this area to make sure that they are embracing the latest technology that their target audience want to be using, so iPhones and iPads and Kindles, and whatever else it happens to be that is the talk of the kids at any given point in time, it would be good to award something for embracing and keeping on that cutting edge.

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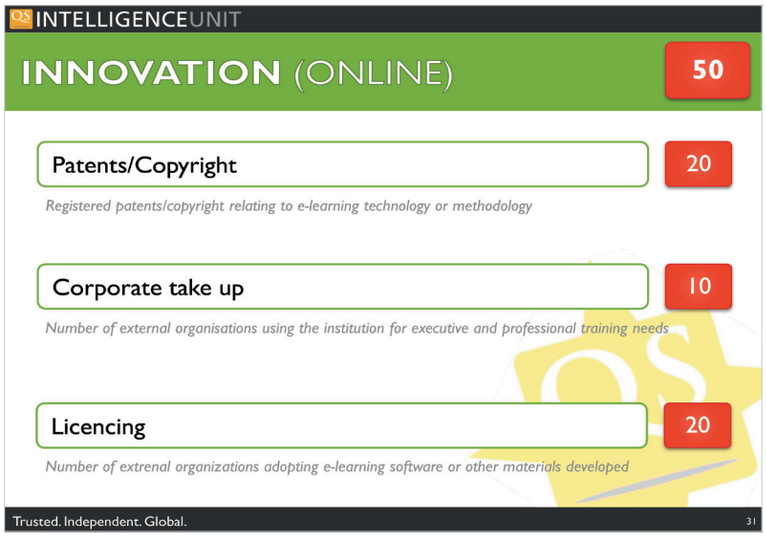
Length of establishment, as mentioned, I think is important, and whether or not those online programmes are recognised and accredited domestically, perhaps. Again, this stuff is all off the top of my head.



In innovation it struck me that some of these institutions are amongst the most innovative in the world – innovation in traditional senses. When we're looking at patents for technology, well that's not necessarily completely excluded here because e-learning's going to require technology, so let's look at intellectual property and development. Let's look at whether or not software and material is being devised specifically for this.

Obviously online is particularly attractive to corporations, for executive and professional training, and I think many of the leading institutions in this field will have recognised that and will be specifically targeting that and those organisations taking up those institutions essentially are a badge of accreditation in their own right, because they tend to have demanding standards, so a suggestion is that we look at that kind of contract as an indicator.

And then also licensing. I know that it is the case at the UOC that they've got other organisations using their platform, that they offer something that is freely available for other organisations to work off, and perhaps that's something to look at too.

So, as I've said these are very off-the-top-of-my-head ways that we could look at online strengths and adapt our ratings methodology, so that essentially an institution could choose an online path through our rating. And if you're an institution that does both online and traditional learning forms, you would probably choose the thing you thought you were best at. And that's okay. And you'd come out in online and we wouldn't perhaps look at your facilities in as much detail.

So that changes things a little bit. Innovation suddenly looks applicable. We've got an alternate path through the facilities obstacle for an institution that would otherwise be unfairly disadvantaged. And in the question-mark areas there are probably some thresholds that would need to be adjusted specifically to suit this kind of institution, but the point is that I think with a little bit more work we could adapt our QS Stars methodology to offer something of value both to online institutions and to our readers, to understand and sort the men from the boys in an online context, to some degree.

That is the end of my presentation. Thank you very much. I'm more than happy to take questions.

Online Universities and Benchmarking Through Rankings

Frits Pannekoek
(President of ICDE.)

President of Athabasca University (2005) and president of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (2008), a UNESCO affiliated body which provides a global network for online and distance education institutions. He is a graduate of the University of Alberta (BA, 1969; MA, 1970), and Queen's University, Kingston (PhD, 1974). His research has contributed to several academic fields, including western Canadian and Métis history, museum and heritage studies, and information and communication studies.

Previously, Dr. Pannekoek was director of information resources at the University of Calgary, with academic appointments in the Department of Communication and Culture and the Department of History. He has also been the chair of the Alberta Library and the Health Knowledge Network, a health information collective.

Dr. Pannekoek is recognized nationally for his leadership in the creation of digital resources, the transformation of academic publishing and the integration of innovative technologies into the learning and teaching environment. He is also well known for his interest in Aboriginal communities. Under his leadership, the. Athabasca University Press, Canada's first twenty-first century scholarly press was launched in 2008, and AU has become an international leader in the promotion of open educational resources. A UNESCO chair in Open Educational Resources, one of two in the world, was established at AU in 2011.

Honoured by provincial, national, international and First Nations organizations, and his research has been supported by major granting institutions. His scholarly publications focus on aspects of Canadian and First Nations' history, communication and culture.

Do rankings matter to university presidents and rectors? Do we care? Of course many university presidents do care or are supposed to care. I should not care. In fact I have to not care. There are various reasons for this. First, Athabasca University was created in 1974 as a radical institution that was supposed to upset existing paradigms. We question the validity of rankings, of their input measures and their output measures by everything we do.

So what is the mission, mandate, and vision of an open university like Athabasca University? We remove barriers to quality post-secondary learning, wherever and whenever we can. What can this mean? First, we attempt to remove barriers to entry. Do we or should we care about grade point average on entry? We should not, at least for undergraduate programs. We should care only that you are 18 years old and are willing to learn. It's anybody in, but not everyone out. So think about what that might mean in the ranking game which focuses on entry grades. Even if the quality of learning is the world's best, the university should never rank in the top quartile or indeed any quartile by this input measure.

Surely what matters is student success and completion rates. I am frequently asked, "What's your completion rate?" or "How long does it take to complete an Athabasca degree?" My response is "What do you think it should be?" We've had a woman from one of Canada's minorities who struggled with everything negative that life could offer. It took her fifteen years to get her bachelor's degree. But at convocation when I watched her

family at the ceremony, she was truly transformed by her learning. More important so were her children and her community who were all there to celebrate.

So how would the ranking industry rank that experience? The university failed because it took the learner fifteen years. The University failed because she had low entry grades. Or the university succeeded in transforming a woman, her family and her community? Does any ranking professional rank universities by their ability to transform society? 74 percent of our students are first in their families to ever get a university degree! That should matter. The point is, if everything was measured against the traditional four year degree, we would be seen to fail. But measured against measures of social transformation, we would be a great success. Isn't that really what universities should be about?

There are other ranking indices like the employability index that might also be questioned. Athabasca University has amongst highest employability ranking of all the universities in Canada, simply because all of our students tend to be employed when they start university. So instead of saying "Isn't that wonderful!" I muse instead whether this variable is useful. Isn't it more important that students achieve their next career aspirations – whatever they might be? That is a more crucial question.

Athabasca University works with Aboriginal communities particularly in the north, and even in the south of Canada, which can have unemployment rates of more than 80%. As an Aboriginal graduate you would very likely get a job in a major urban centre immediately. On the other hand you could go back to transform your community. But this might take a generation and it might mean a life of poverty. Do we ever measure the impact of those graduates who make this difficult choice?

But this being said the question remains, "Can we rank yet differentiate ourselves as a university born in rebellion, that's supposed to change the paradigm, to challenge the norms?" We think about this question carefully and deliberately because when we rank we will both consciously and subconsciously modify our behaviours to improve our chosen indicators. We do not want to change ourselves to suit the rankers, rather to provide quality learning and improve service to students. So what could be a better measure? Perhaps a university like ours should be measured by consistency to mission. We must have strong ethical standards and be committed to our mission of individual and societal transformation. Students are motivated to want that transformation because they want change to their existing condition They are actually looking for transformative rankings and standards.

So, meaningful rankings can matter to both learners and administrators. Would I let meaningful rankings influence me? Yes. Do I know that our students would look at them? Yes. And I am glad that they would! Rankings are simply one of many ways to brand an institution and brand it amongst learners as a quality product. And even if we're a radical university we know it does matter. Does it matter to our students if they get into a first ranking institution's law school upon completion of an Athabasca University undergraduate degree? Of course! And perhaps that should be one of our measures. It matters to us, because it shows that they can enter the mainstream through a different learning experience. It proves that they have been transformed, and that possibly their communities will be transformed, but through a different pathway.

The real issue in any ranking exercise is how to determine "quality." Quality matters as much if not more to radical institutions than traditional institutions. But, how do you measure that quality? This is a much debated question in open and distance and now e learning institutions. The measures that are being used by rankers are very often surrogate measures and for open and distance universities it is no different. Does the size of the library matter? Do the state of the laboratories matter? We also do not pay attention to rankings about size of classrooms or the condition of facilities. What matters is the state of the cyber-infrastructure. That's our capital, that's our classroom, that's how we should be funded and compared.

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What then is a university that is radical to do? What is an open university to do? What is a university that's about social transformation to do? There are activities that we are involved in that traditional ranking agencies find problematic. For example we are aggressively involved in prior learning assessment. That is, if somebody has been working in the world for fifteen to twenty years, what is that knowledge worth in traditional credits? Athabasca University allows more PLAR opportunities than any university in Canada. Some more traditional institutions suggest that this is inappropriate. So to ensure the transferability of our students we have to ameliorate what we might consider better PLAR practise.

Another measure is usually the number of PhDs teaching in a classroom. But is that question really relevant? Every course is designed by a team of PhDs, both in content and in pedagogical method. But again, it is largely tutors who deliver the course through various online media. Most of them have at least a Masters degree, and many have PhDs. So how do rankers deal with that? The student tutor ratio might be 200 to one, yet from the student perspective it is a one to one relationship.

Professorial citation rankings can be another problem. Yes, professors at open and distance universities do have often very high citation rankings. At Athabasca University we have Canada research chairs in a number of subject areas, for example: astronomy, Aboriginal studies, and distance learning. It matters to our students that we do research. Can we ever achieve a significant ranking in those? No, because we will never have the same tenured faculty to student ratio because of our business model. Our professors do research, and develop the courses but media and learning specialists create them and tutors offer them. So the staff to student ratios might be the same, but the tenured faculty to student ratio is much, much higher. Should we change our construct to meet a ranking criteria? Or should we focus on learning outcomes rather than inputs?

Given the perceived tutor-student ration, it should be no surprise that we get one of the highest student satisfaction ratings of any university, certainly in Alberta. Are we proud of that? Some might argue that it could mean that we have the easiest courses. It could mean that we fail fewer students than any other institution. Or it could mean they are happy with the online experience since so many of them never contact a tutor. But is a happy student a successful or transformed student? If we don't challenge students, if we don't make them uncomfortable and we don't challenge their suppositions, we're failing. So maybe the criteria should not be happiness, but rather whether students have been challenged, whether their thinking as been transformed? Has your world view been turned upside-down? Have you had an epiphany of some kind or another? Perhaps these are better questions.

Nevertheless non-traditional or radical universities are faced with the realities of ranking. So how has Athabasca University adjusted itself to the measured, and how has it accommodated the measuring world? A few years ago the government of Alberta decided (as did many jurisdictions) to "sector" the post secondary institutions. Of the twenty-six institutions in the Province four were considered comprehensive academic research institutions. Another grouping would be largely undergraduate degree institutions, another group regional colleges, another technical institutions, and a forth specialized institutions. The various institutions were also given geographical responsibilities. Institutions were consulted as to where they thought they might best fit. There was no intent to rank institutions within these categories. Rather, the government wanted to ensure that each sector would meet key quality standards set by the province.

Athabasca found itself in the first category. While this allowed us to offer graduate programmes and undertake research, it did not necessarily help with rankings. The same questions I outlined above remained. While we believe in open entrance at the undergraduate level, to ensure learner success, we did put rigorous entry standards for our graduate degrees. However we did allow entry into some graduate programmes, as do most universities, without an undergraduate degree. However, competence has to be demonstrated. So radicalism has had to be ameliorated by practicality.

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The perceived issues of quality remain despite the quality framework imposed by the province. Everywhere I go internationally, people ask, "Where are you accredited?" The Canadian system requires universities to fall under appropriate legislation and to go a very rigorous quality assurance process. However there is no accreditation process as such. If you're an online institution and an institution involved in social transformation, you have to have a very understanding government because you will be outside the traditional quality indicators.

But if you are attempting to recruit abroad, you do need transparent accreditation. That is why we chose to seek American Middle States accreditation. We are the only public Canadian university to do this. You have to understand Canadian politics and the nation's love-hate relationship with the United States to see how potentially dangerous an American accreditation could be. Middle States does not rank. Rather they encourage a process of rigorous self-assessment. This is followed by an assessment of peers from across the globe. The process helps an institution to continuously improve, to come to terms with its radical nature, not to temper that nature, but to make the radical experience a meaningful one for students.

We also have peer-reviewed many of our courses during development. How many traditional university professors take the courses they teach in their classroom to peer-review? We also of course have accreditation in every program that needs professional accreditation. We have the largest nursing program in Canada and of course it must meet and receive accreditation from the appropriate bodies. Professional accreditation is not always easy. Some bodies still believe that face to face learning is the only way that quality can be maintained, even though studies indicate otherwise.

We also have to participate in mandatory government surveys, which are often geared towards residential face to face institutions. But we can often influence the surveys with additional questions. The Province of Alberta has student attitudinal and employment surveys which are done every other year. We generally do very well in both, because the tutor online model provides the perception of a one on one learning experience. We do extraordinarily well on employability surveys, because most of our students are employed while they learn. However, what we really want to focus on is whether the learner was successful, and, most important, did their career change meet expectations?

Learners also want universities in Canada to have a robust credit transfer system. They would like to move courses from any university to their host institution. While the Canadian transfer protocols are not perfect, for the most part they do work. A significant portion of AU students are single or double course takers who need transfer credit. This allows students at the semester based face to face institutions to complete their degrees on time. My suspicion is that we are a great service to helping these universities achieve better and more timely completions. How do you put this service into a ranking system?

We have also chosen to become leaders in what I call "scholarly dissemination." Can we ever fit into any of the existing metrics? Probably not! Frankly, do we care? Probably not. What I care most about is that AU's leading scholars have their knowledge available worldwide. What matters is not the number of print copies sold but rather the number of downloads. It's knowledge that is transformative, but do any of the rankers consider this?

As a radical university, we fervently believe in open access. Everything we publish is on line and is free under a creative commons license. However, print copies are also available through a usual publishing process. The press, now in its fifth year, is very successful. Its authors are read internationally with downloads into the several thousands. Print sales are also higher than the Canadian norm for scholarly books. The citation indices for AU Press scholars are significantly higher; it has helped build AU's brand as a leading open university. Most important of all it has helped make scholarly information available to a more general audience.

Canada is revisiting its copyright legislation which could adversely impact the open access movement. We have led the arguments for a more liberal copyright regime. But how should this play with the ranking industry.

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At the moment they base their rankings of a system of exclusion not inclusion. That is, asking "How many students do you exclude?" and "How many library books do you have, that others do not?" There are very few ranking standards that come to mind that are inclusive rather than exclusive. Is any institution ranked by the ranking industry as a whole on the percentage of courses which use open education resources?

We also pursue research grants. Recently, we were informed that we got two major research chairs from the province of Alberta. The chairs were not in e-learning as one might suspect, but rather in environmental analytics and water. Both will be able to do involved research at a distance and with a distributed graduate student body. Is this nuance measured by the ranking industry?

Students do look at this. They demand an intensive research university, but one in which they can become involved. We also have a research chair in Aboriginal studies, and another in astronomy. Astronomy is a subject well suited to an e environment. Today most telescopes are digital and can be manipulated from a distance. So now it is possible to complete a degree in astrophysics entirely through digital environments. You can transmit all of the information digitally, so in fact, our telescopes could be manipulated by students from their home computers. So yes, you can do a physics degree in astronomy entirely by distance. And yes, you can manipulate the equipment. And yes, our research chair is involved with NASA in some of their research. In July 2011 our researcher's project was featured on the front cover of Nature. So again, can small open universities make a difference? Yes, of course they can.

We also work with institutions across Canada, as we try to radicalise and ginger the post secondary environment. We measure ourselves by how many radical initiatives that are truly transformative we have become involved in. For example, there was a movement in Canada that seems ordinary to many of you, but it was to transform all scholarly communication within the country from print to digital. It is still facing suspicion, largely because the economic model has not been resolved. But there is hope that it can be. Athabasca University has been active in the Canadian Association of Learned Journals, attempting to move all journals to the new digital reality. We are recognized by our peers as pioneers in digital communication. Do the rankers measure transformation of this kind? No, although I hope they would. An institution's influence in its nation, its region, and in its community really matters.

So, I've explained to a degree what we could do in order to build a brand as a radical institution and indeed how we might begin to be measured. But what do we not do? First, we have not participated in the national ranking forms. Maclean's and the Globe and Mail are the key rankers in Canada. For the most part they only weigh traditional input measures. So, we have not participated. Since the delivery of this address, the Financial Times has moved to rank on line institutions. Whether this will be embraced remains to be seen. Will we begin to behave to ensure the highest possible ranking from the Financial Times. We will see.

Recently Canadian universities, even those traditionally in the top five, have chosen not to participate in the national ranking game, These institutions realize that if you are in the top three, from time to time you will gain or lose a ranking. This will make headlines. Generally now they make little comment when they have either risen or fallen in the rankings. It is no longer of real interest. Might this still be mentioned in a speech – of course – but not to the same degree it once was. It will be interesting to see what happens when open and digital universities are ranked – whether they will behave in the same way.

What we've also decided to do at Athabasca University, and I think it's important that other distance and open universities also behave in this way, is to not let ourselves be othered. That is, in colonial theory, what often happens is there is a group who is marginalised. They create their own agencies and their own ranking industry. In effect they are saying: "We are now building our own world and we are going to be totally separate from your world - that world." I would plea with all digital and open universities to participate in the traditional ranking industry although it must be transformed and recognize the reality of the new university. If you truly

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want to transform the world, change the world. Do not create your own set of rankings that will in the end tyrannize the next generation of transformative post secondary experiences. .

So what is our university doing to evidence that behaviour? We do belong to traditional organizations like the AUCC, the Association of University Colleges of Canada, which is the national body to which the face to face institutions belong. And are we welcome? We certainly seem to be, although with some suspicion. We have also been a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. The Open University of the UK's, Brenda Gourley was President of AUC, which showed that behaving and arguing within the traditional paradigm can have impact. There is no need to create an othered body, but it is critical to understand and influence the terms of engagement. Open Universities have until recently not been good at that.

So do we need alternative rankings? I'm not sure. I'm not sure that alternative rankings really would matter if you are a truly a radical institution that must always be on the leading edge. Because once the rankers catch up to you, and they obviously will, you should be already transforming what you are doing. A radical university should always be playing against the rankings. My plea to the Open University movement is for them not to forget their radical origins. Always fight against the rankings no matter what they are. No matter where you sit in those rankings, it's your duty to be constantly transformative. It's your duty to question the system. The tendency will be for all alternative forms of post secondary learning that were born in a radical tradition, in the tradition of socially transformation, to want to move towards the centre of acceptance.

I hope that the youth of this country embrace those institutions that are transformative and that governments cherish them, hold them to task and to their mission. Generally the ranking industry measures tradition, not some other future. I would remind everyone that in the design of quality indications, there is and will always be a commercial dimension. There is also a real and often unspoken partnership between rankers and accreditors. Do we pay attention to rankers or do we pay attention to an accreditation process? Most of us tend to pay more attention to the accreditation process, that process of self-study and reflection, which involves students, community, as well as scholars, researchers, and government. This process may have benchmarks, but as often as not it is really a commitment of an institution to continuous improvement. But the question remains – precisely what are we trying to continuously improve? Some suggest that governments should be responsible for quality control, accreditation and the self study process. I do know from my career as a civil servant, that when one gets governments involved in quality exercises, governments rarely differentiate between institutional types and if they do they will generally move to consensus which privileges the status quo. In the Canadian context governments are incremental rather radical in their approach to change. No matter what any individual institution's course of action, it will be challenged by the rankers, by the institution itself, by its peers, and by tradition. New roads are never easy

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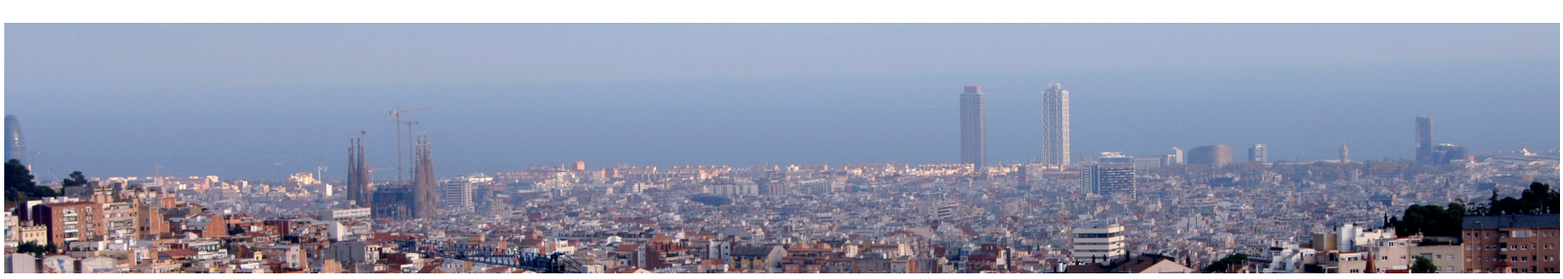

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