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Main Conclusions

1. There is no doubt that the arrival on the scene of global classifications and rankings of universities has galvanized the world of higher education. Since the emergence of global rankings, universities have been unable to avoid national and international comparisons, and this has

caused changes in the way universities function.

2. Rankings and particularly the global league tables have adopted methodologies which address the world's top research universities only. De facto, the methodologies give stable results for only 700-1000 universities, which is only a small portion of the approximately 17,000 universities in the world. The majority of the world's universities are left out of the equation. While such an approach may well serve the purpose of producing a list of top universities, the problem is that the flurry of activity surrounding these rankings, often initiated by the ranking providers themselves, affects the whole higher education community as it tends to result in all higher education institutions being judged according to criteria that are appropriate for the top research universities only.

3. Rankings so far cover only some university missions. Few rankings address the broad diversity of types and various missions of higher education institutions.

4. Rankings, it is claimed, make universities more 'transparent'. However, the methodologies of the existing rankings, and especially those of the most popular league tables, still lack transparency themselves. It is difficult, if not impossible, to follow the calculations made from raw data to indicator values and, from there, to the overall score, just by using publicly available information.

5. "There is no such thing as an objective indicator" (see AUBR, 2010). The lack of suitable indicators is most apparent when measuring university teaching performance, for which there are no suitable proxies. The situation is better when evaluating research performance. However, even the bibliometric indicators used to measure research performance have their biases and flaws. Ranking providers are making some effort to improve their methodologies, but the improvements usually concern the calculation method, while the real problem is the use of inadequate proxies, or the omission of part of the information due to methodological constraints. Proxies can be improved, but they are still proxies.

6. At present, it would be difficult to argue that the benefits offered by the information that rankings provide, as well as the increased 'transparency,' are greater than the negative effects of the so-called 'unwanted consequences' of rankings.

7. New attempts to develop classifications, rankings and ratings targeting all higher education institutions and their various missions, such as the AUBR EU Assessment of University-Based Research, U-Map, U-Multirank and AHELO, all aim to improve the situation. However, it is too early to tell how these new tools will work; they are still at various stages of development or pilot implementation, and all of them still face difficult issues, particularly problems of data collection and the development of new proxies.

8. Higher education policy decisions should not be based solely on rankings data.

(Fonte: Andrejs Rauhvargers, EUA Report on rankings 2011. © European University Association 2011)