

DRAFT – NOT FOR CIRCULATION

# Impact and Influence of League Tables and Ranking Systems on Institutional Decision-making

Ellen Hazelkorn

Higher Education Policy Research Unit (HEPRU)

Director and Dean, Faculty of Applied Arts

Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

Institutional Diversity: Rankings and Typologies in Higher  
Education

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'The University itself is ranked among the top UK universities for the quality of its teaching '

` Top of the ... Student Satisfaction table'

'Our position is clearly the second Finnish University in international rankings'

'The number one destination for international students studying in Australia'

'Institution accredited by FIMPES, Excelencia académica SEP, x Place in academic program of...'

# Themes

1. League Tables and Institutional Decision-making
2. Preliminary Findings
3. Observations

# 1. League Tables and Institutional Decision-making

# Issues Identified

- Technical and Methodological Difficulties
  - way in which data is either collected or interpreted
  - use of indicators as proxies for quality
- Usefulness of the results as consumer information
  - do league tables/rankings provide the right kind of information for incoming students?
  - what is influencing student choice: 'halo effect', 'reputational ratings' and 'rater bias'?
- Ability to compare complex institutions
  - institutions compared with inappropriate peers
  - impose 'one-size-fits-all' definition of HEI?
  - 'Matthew Effect' in operation?

# Summary of Comments

Difficulty with league tables and ranking systems is:

- how they are aggregated,
- the interpretation that may be ascribed to the results, and
- the uses, decisions and actions that may follow

# Challenges for HEIs

- Are *League Tables and Ranking Systems* influencing and informing institutional decision-making?
  - strategy and mission
  - institutional priorities – academic and research
  - resource allocation
  - recruitment and marketing
- Do HEIs monitor the performance of peer institutions?
- Do *League Tables and Ranking Systems* influence collaboration or partnerships?
- Do *League Tables and Ranking Systems* influence the views or decisions of key stakeholders?
- Are *League Tables and Ranking Systems* influencing broader higher education objectives and priorities?
- Who should undertake ranking and which metrics should be used?

# International Study

- Study examines the impact and influence of League Tables and Rankings on academic behaviour and institutional decision-making
- Conducted in association with IMHE (OECD) and IAU – using their membership lists
- Email questionnaires sent to leaders/senior administrators in June-September 2006
  - 639 questionnaires sent, with some unquantifiable 'snowballing'
  - 202 replies received
  - 31.6% response rate

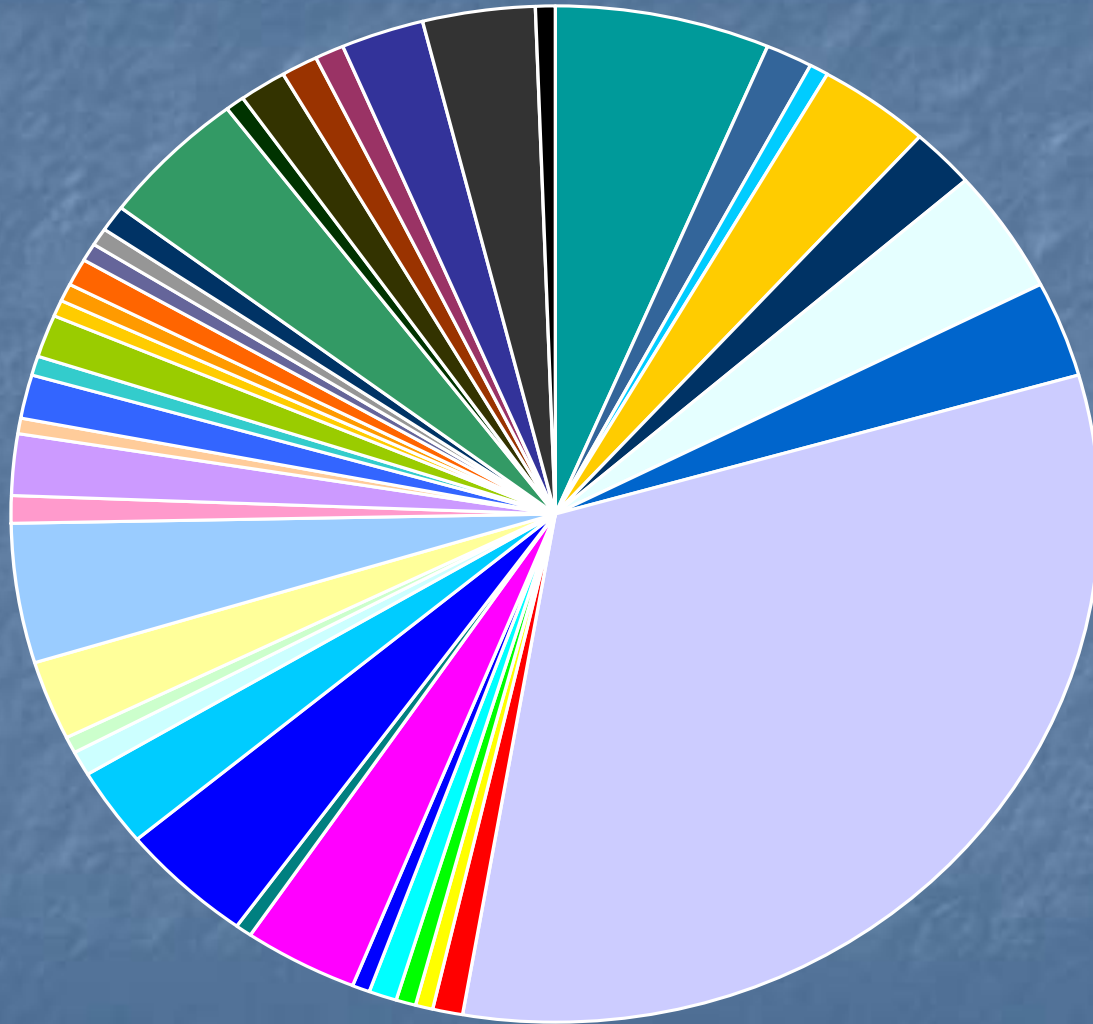
## 2. Preliminary Findings

# Respondent Profile (n=202)

- Age:
  - 36.5% post 1970
  - 23.7% 1945-1969
  - 39.7% pre 1945
- 83% publicly funded
- Institutional type
  - 30.4% teaching intensive
  - 19.3% research informed
  - 29.2% research intensive

# Global Distribution

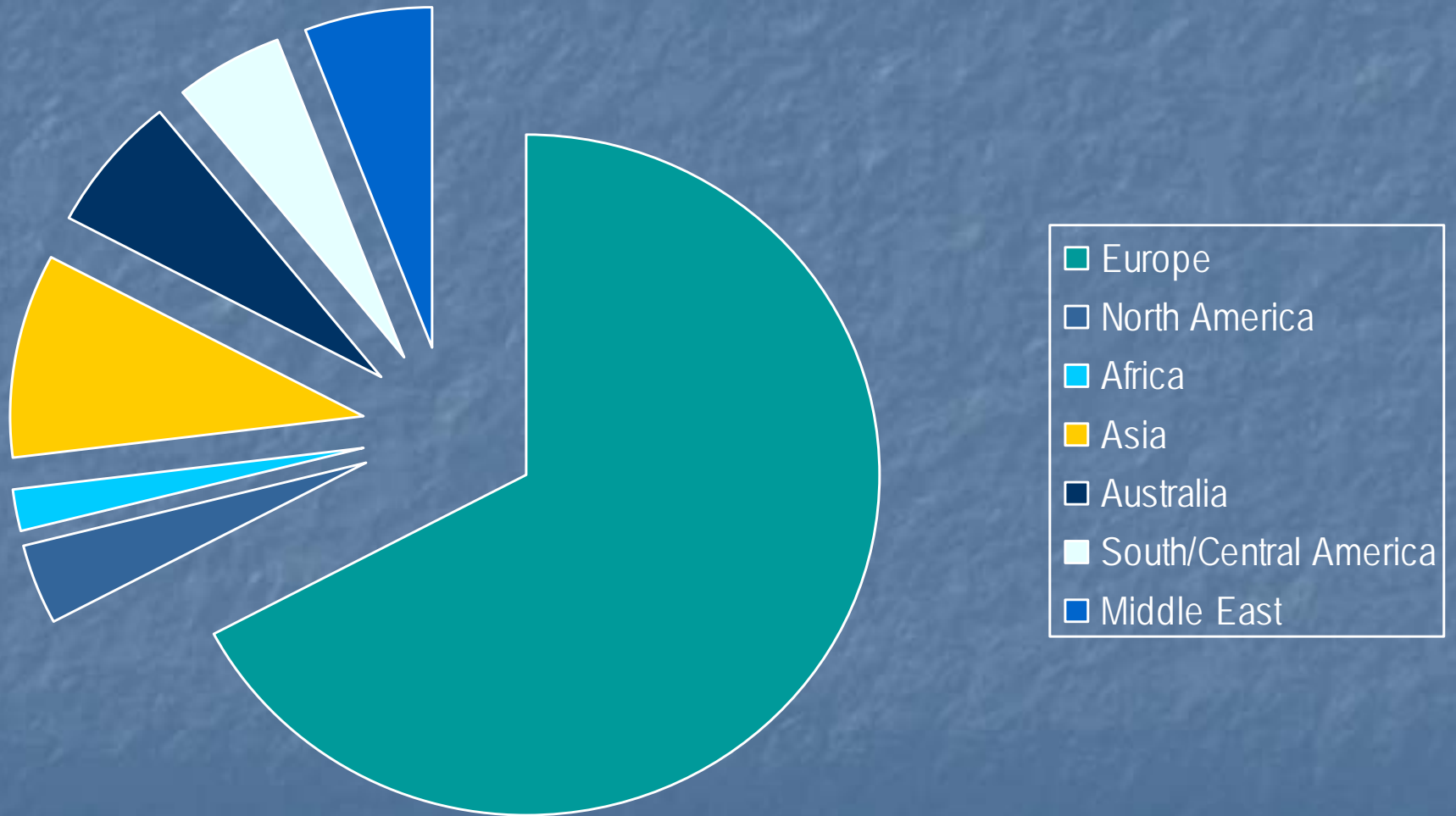
41 countries, N=156



- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| Australia    | Austria      |
| Belgium      | Canada       |
| China        | Denmark      |
| Finland      | Germany      |
| Greece       | Iceland      |
| India        | Iran         |
| Iraq         | Ireland      |
| Italy        | Japan        |
| Jordan       | Kenya        |
| Lebanon      | Lithuania    |
| Mexico       | Mongolia     |
| Netherlands  | N Cyprus     |
| Norway       | Paraguay     |
| Philippines  | Portugal     |
| Rwanda       | Saudi Arabia |
| Serbia       | Slovenia     |
| South Africa | Spain        |
| Sri Lanka    | Sweden       |
| Switzerland  | Thailand     |
| Turkey       | UK           |
| USA          |              |

# Regional Distribution

41 countries, N=156

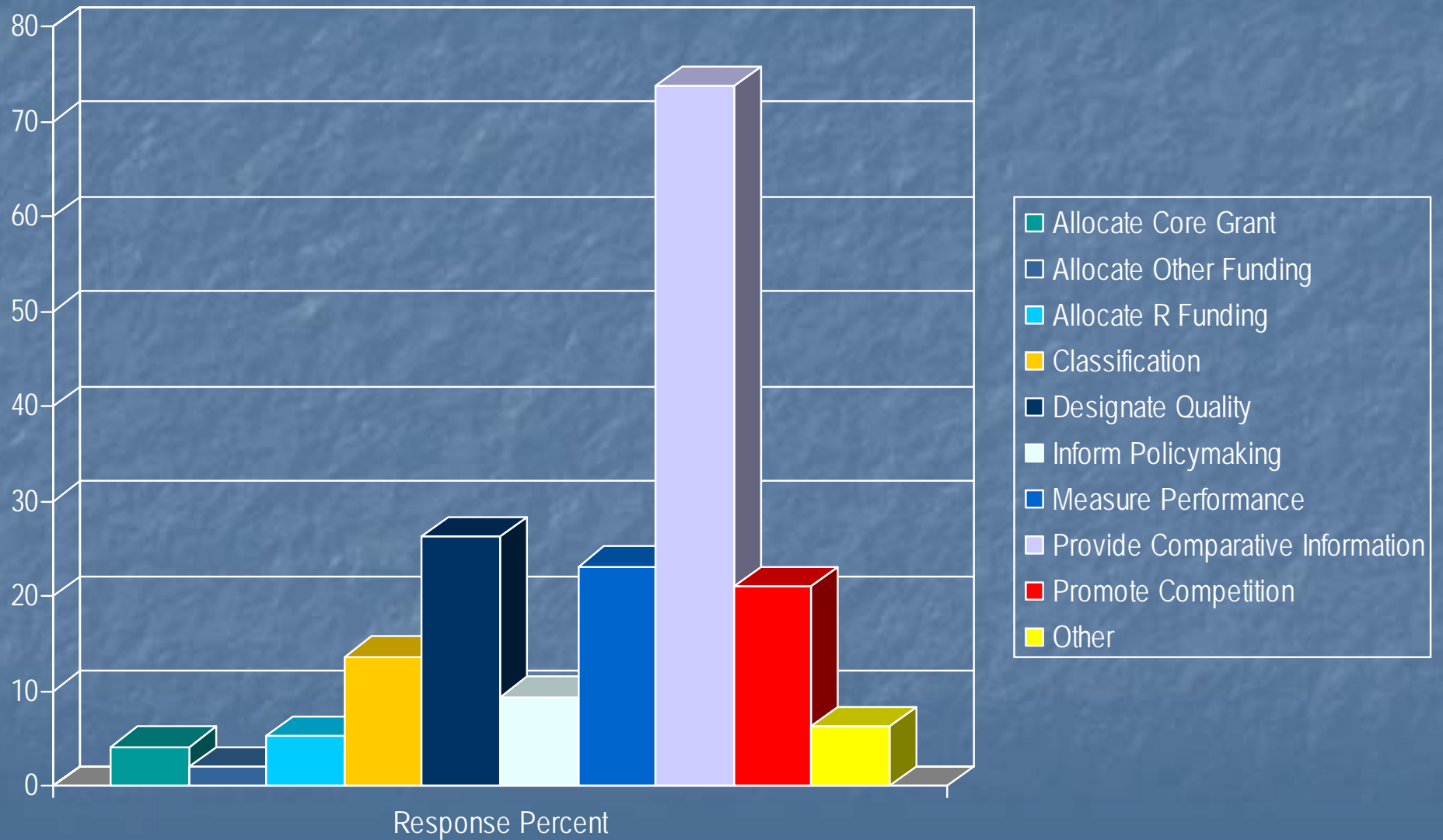


- Overview of league tables and ranking systems

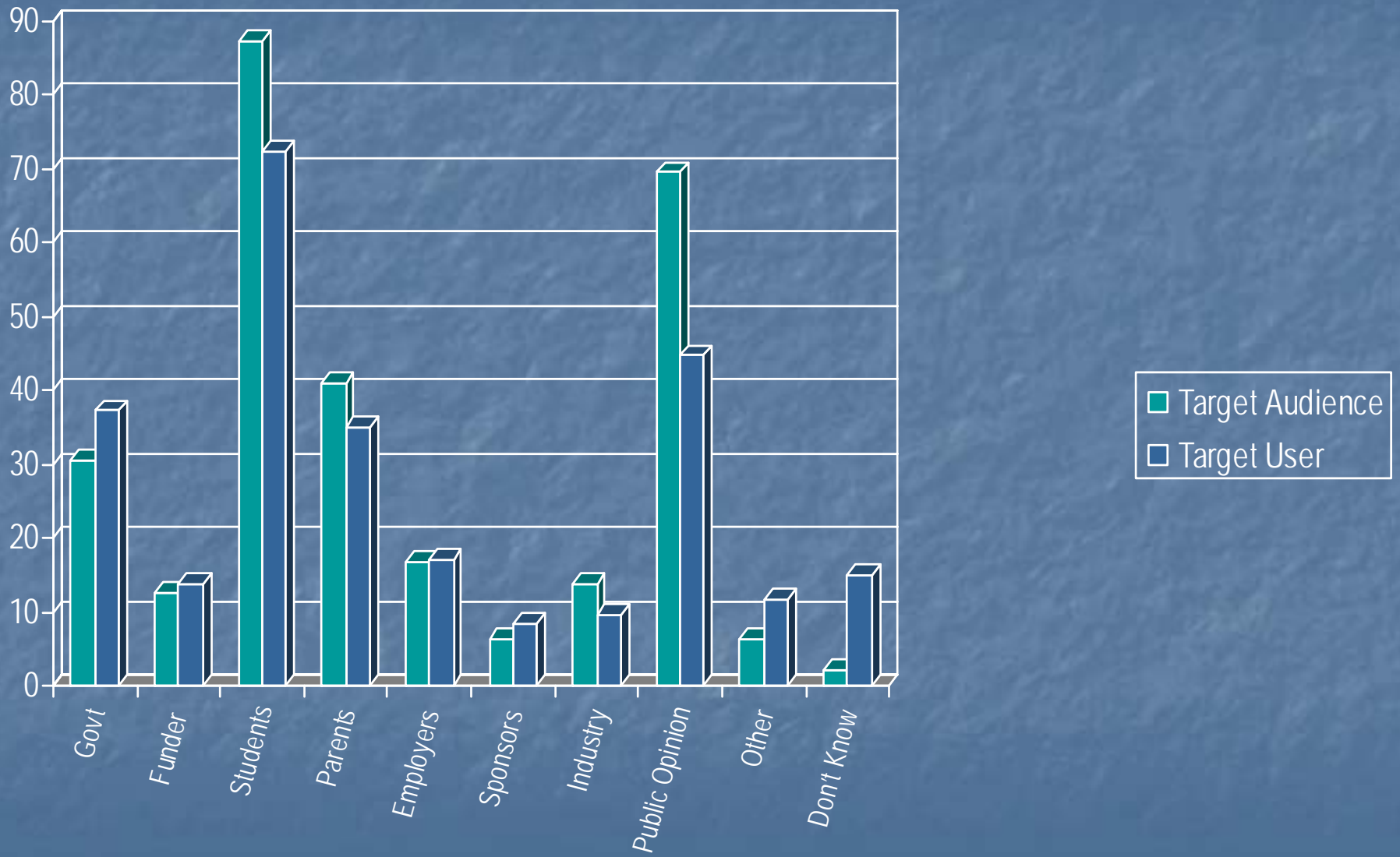
# Popularity of Ranking

- 47% respondents said LTRS were being developed or used in their country (N= 146)
  - 27% were operating for <5 years
  - 68% were operating for >5 years
- Yet, 60% said the results of worldwide LTRS were published in their country
- 90% said the results were published widely
  - Popular Media organisations are overwhelmingly responsible for developing tables

# Stated Purpose of LTRS (n=95)



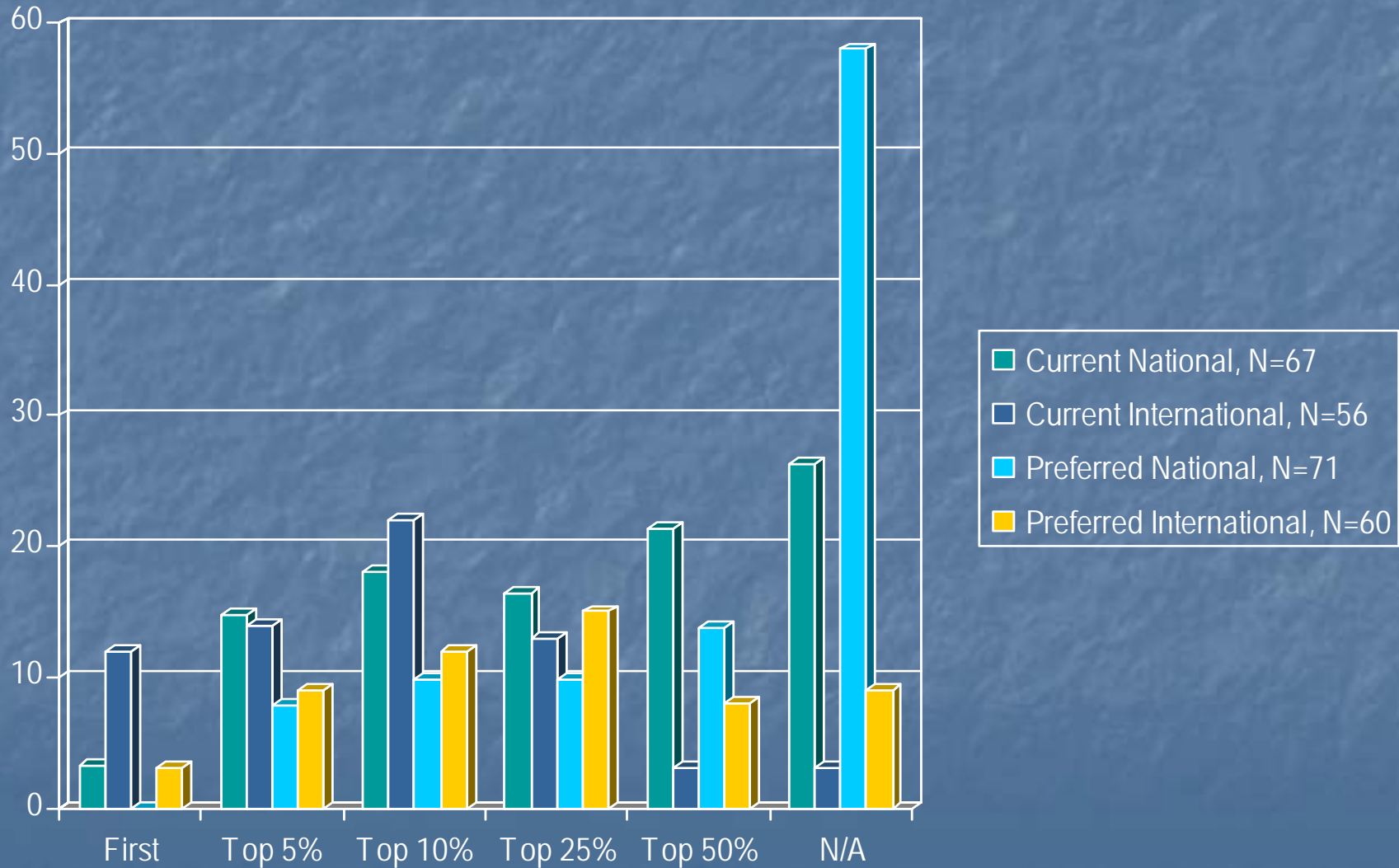
# Audience vs. User (n=90)



# Ranking Status

- Over 70% respondents ranked nationally and over 40% ranked internationally (N=85)
- 40% respondents not happy with current institutional ranking
  - 5 respondents indicated there was a 'process' by which they made comments or sought to present alternative views of their institution
- 72% and 61%, respectively, want to improve their national or international ranking

# Current Rank vs. Preferred Rank

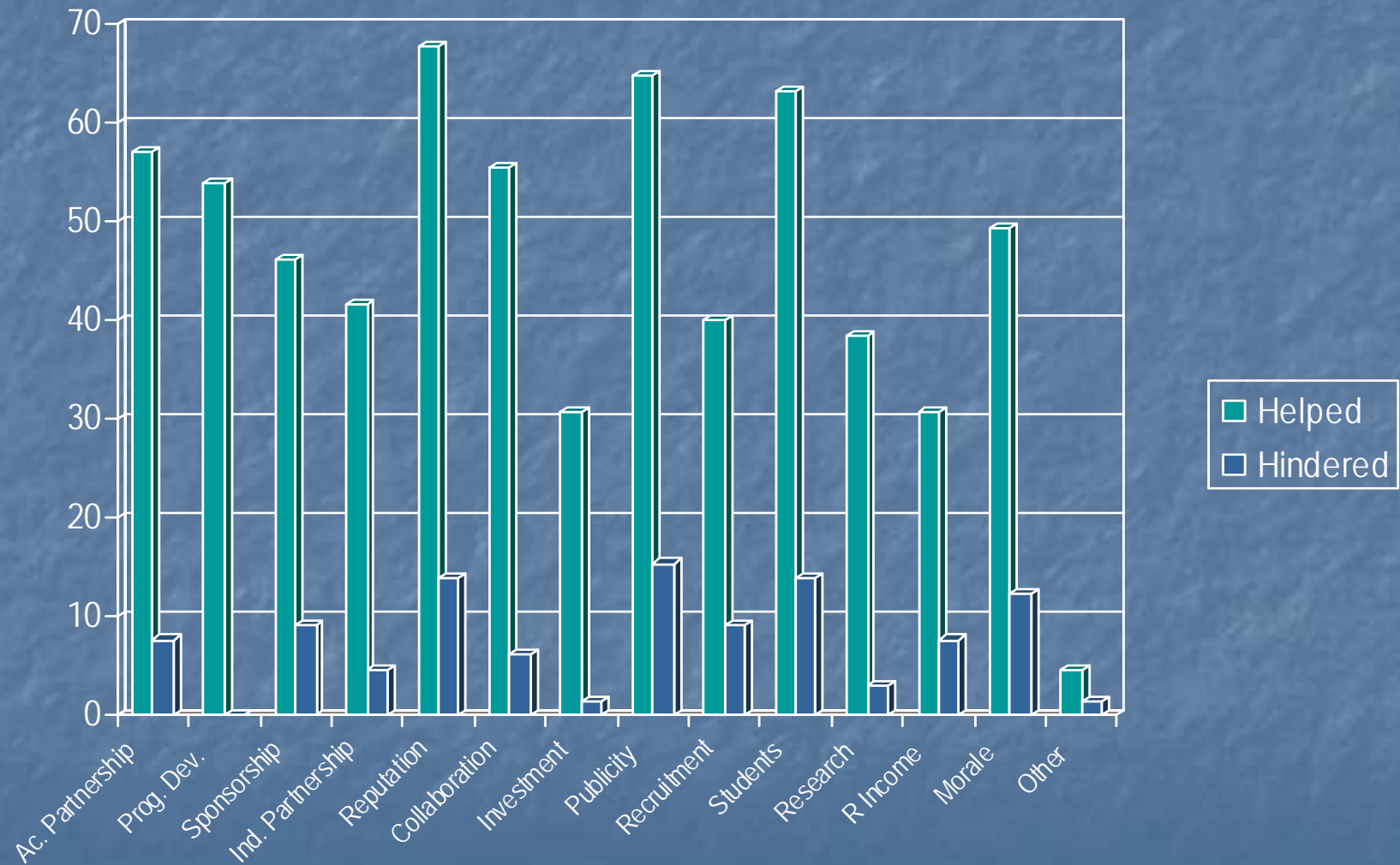


- Importance of ranking on institutional decision-making

# Impact on Institution

- While 57% think LTRS impact has been broadly positive on institution's reputation, 17% believe they have had no impact. (N=76)
- Almost 50% use their institutional position for publicity purposes: press releases, official presentations, website (N=79)
- 56% have a formal internal mechanism for reviewing their rank (N=77)
  - 53% by the Vice Chancellor, President or Rector
  - 15% by the Governing Authority

# Helped or Hindered (1) (N=65)



# Helped or Hindered (2)

	Examples
Academic Partnerships	More interest from other institutions; Easier to present the institution to partners and funders
Academic Programme Development	Poor results lead to reflection and curriculum review
Benefactors/Sponsors	More financial support; 'We are a more attractive prospect'
Industry Partnerships	'less support' vs. 'better known'
Institutional Reputation	'decline in students' vs. 'widespread recognition'
International Collaboration	Better known than otherwise would be
Investment	'We can argue more strongly for the legislators and donors to fund our projects'
Marketing and Publicity	'less foreign students' vs. 'Saying top 10 makes matters easier'
Recruitment of Faculty	'success breeds success'
Recruitment of Students	'decline in enrolment' vs. 'good students come to us'
Research Development	'its possible to attract attention and funding'
Research Income	'less grants' vs. 'no correlation'
Staff Morale	'high rankings are well received'; 'increase pride'

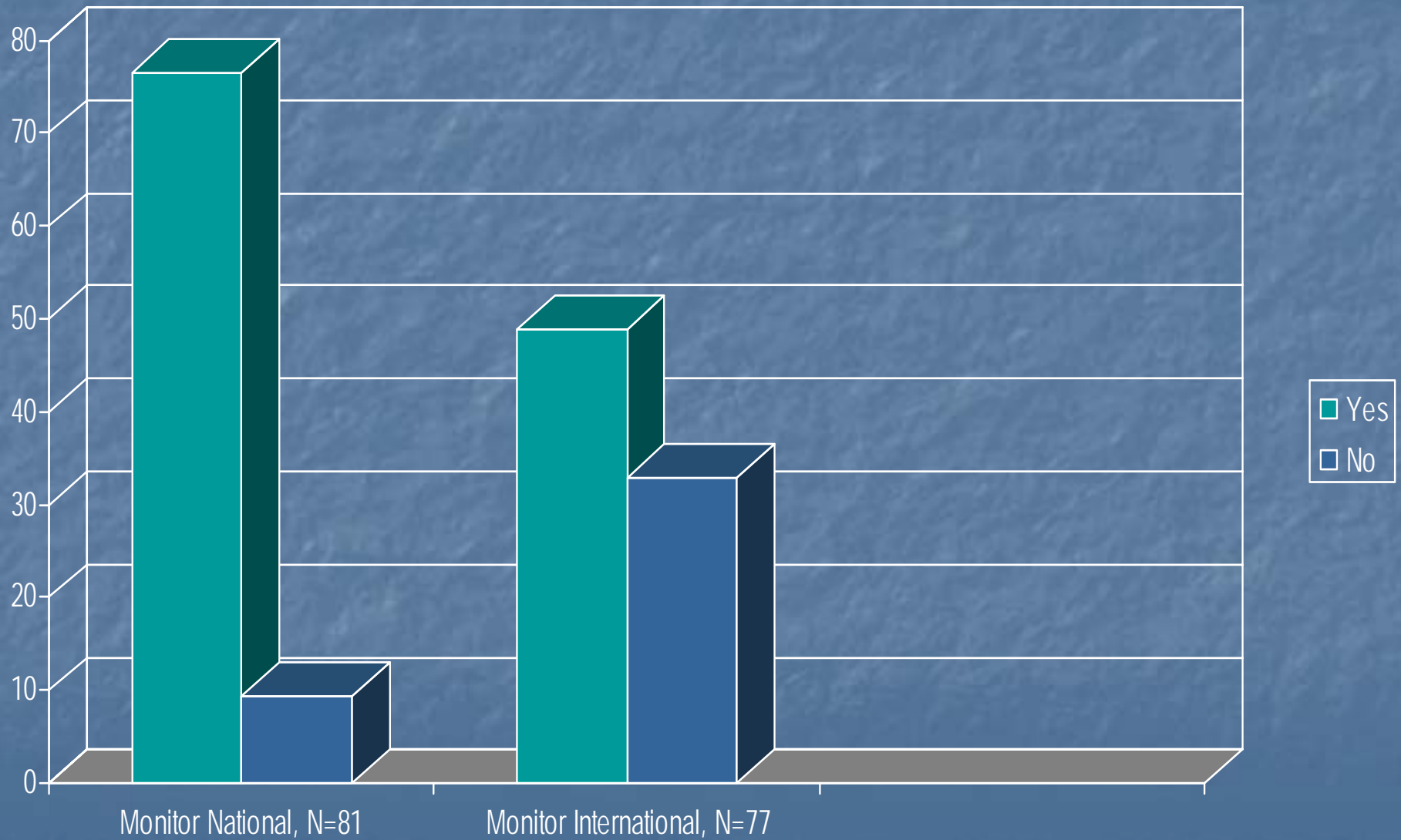
# Actions Arising (1)

- 47% have taken strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions in response to the results (N=71)
- Of those,
  - Overwhelming majority took either strategic (68%) or academic (60%) decisions and actions
  - Only 8% respondents indicated they had taken no action

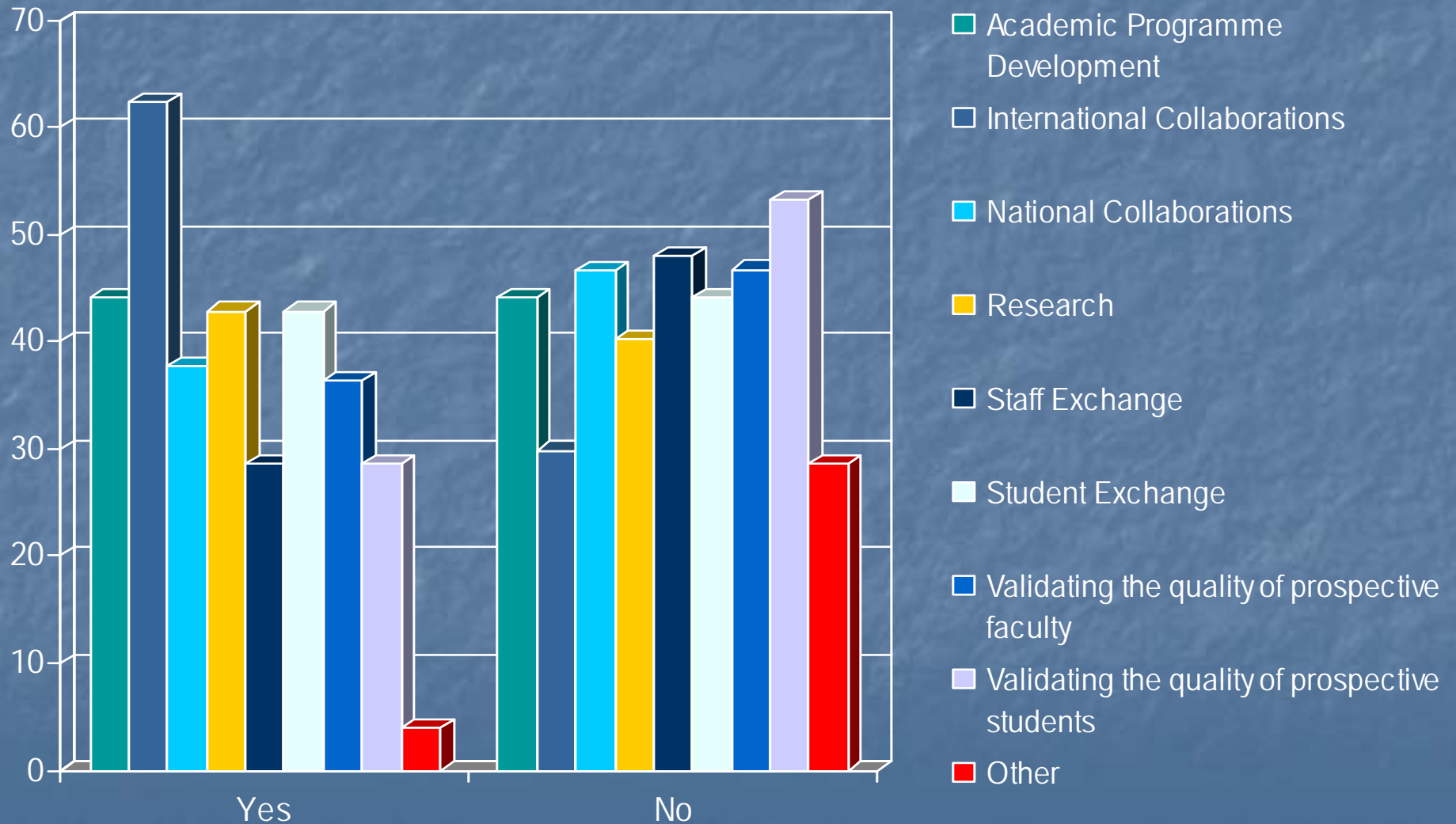
# Actions Arising (2)

	Examples
Strategy	'Indicators underlying rankings are explicit part of target agreements between rector and faculties'; became part of a SWOT analysis; benchmarking exercises
Organisation	New section established to deal with indicator improvements and monitor rankings; reorganisation of structure; organise investigation team
Management	'Rector enforces the serious and precise processing of ranking as well as control of the relevant indicators'; development of better management tools;
Academic	Improve teaching and learning; new academic programmes; increase English language programmes; more scholarships and staff appointments

# Monitor Peer Performance



# Consider Peer Ranking Prior to Discussions (n=77)

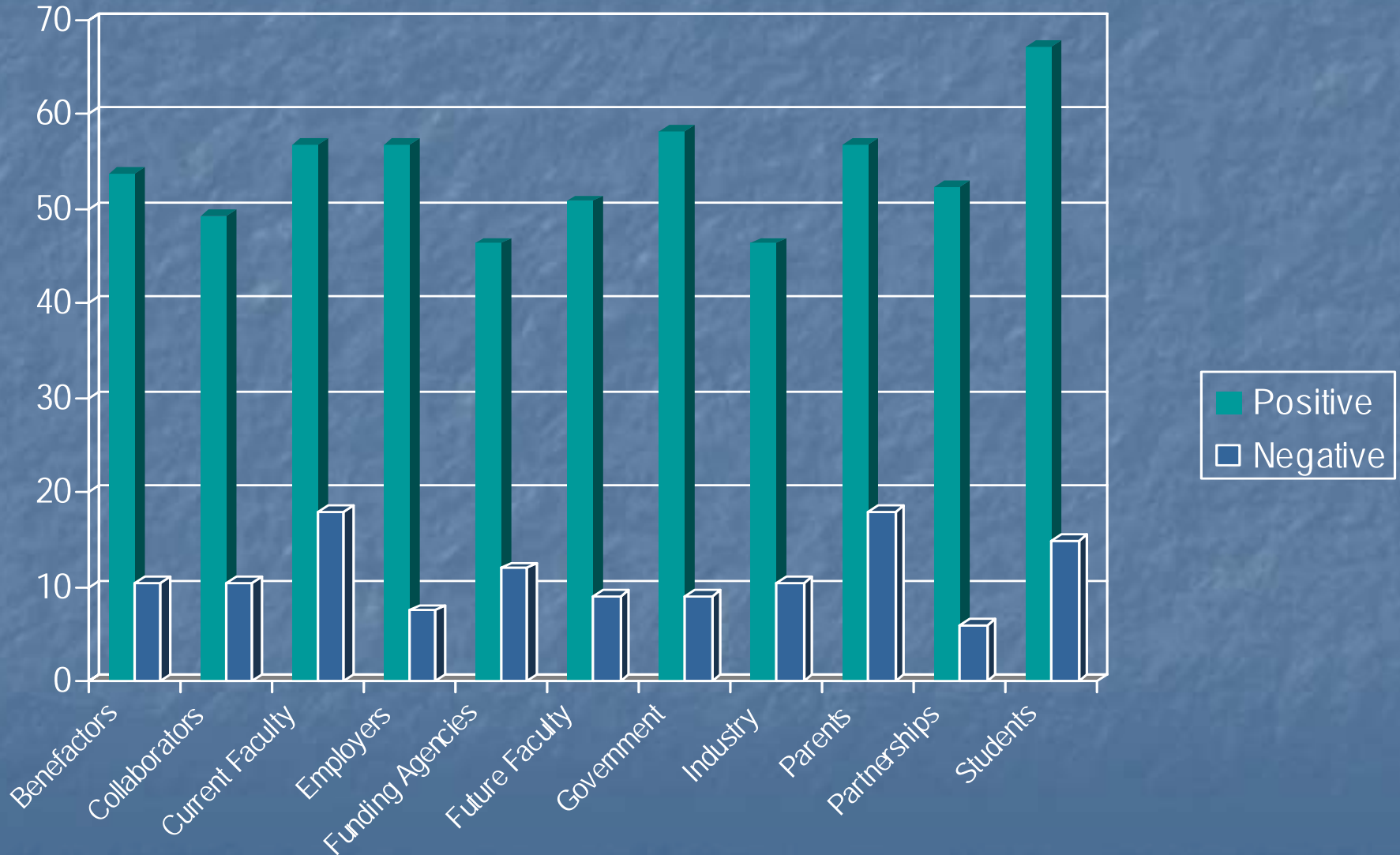


# Influencing Collaboration?

- Almost 40% of respondents said they did consider an HEI's rank prior to entering into discussion about variety of collaborations.
- 44% said they thought LTRS were influencing willingness of other HEIs to partner with them.
- 29% said LTRS were influencing willingness of other HEIs to support their institution's members of academic/professional organisations.

- Influence of Ranking on Key Stakeholders

# LTRS Influencing Stakeholders (N=60)

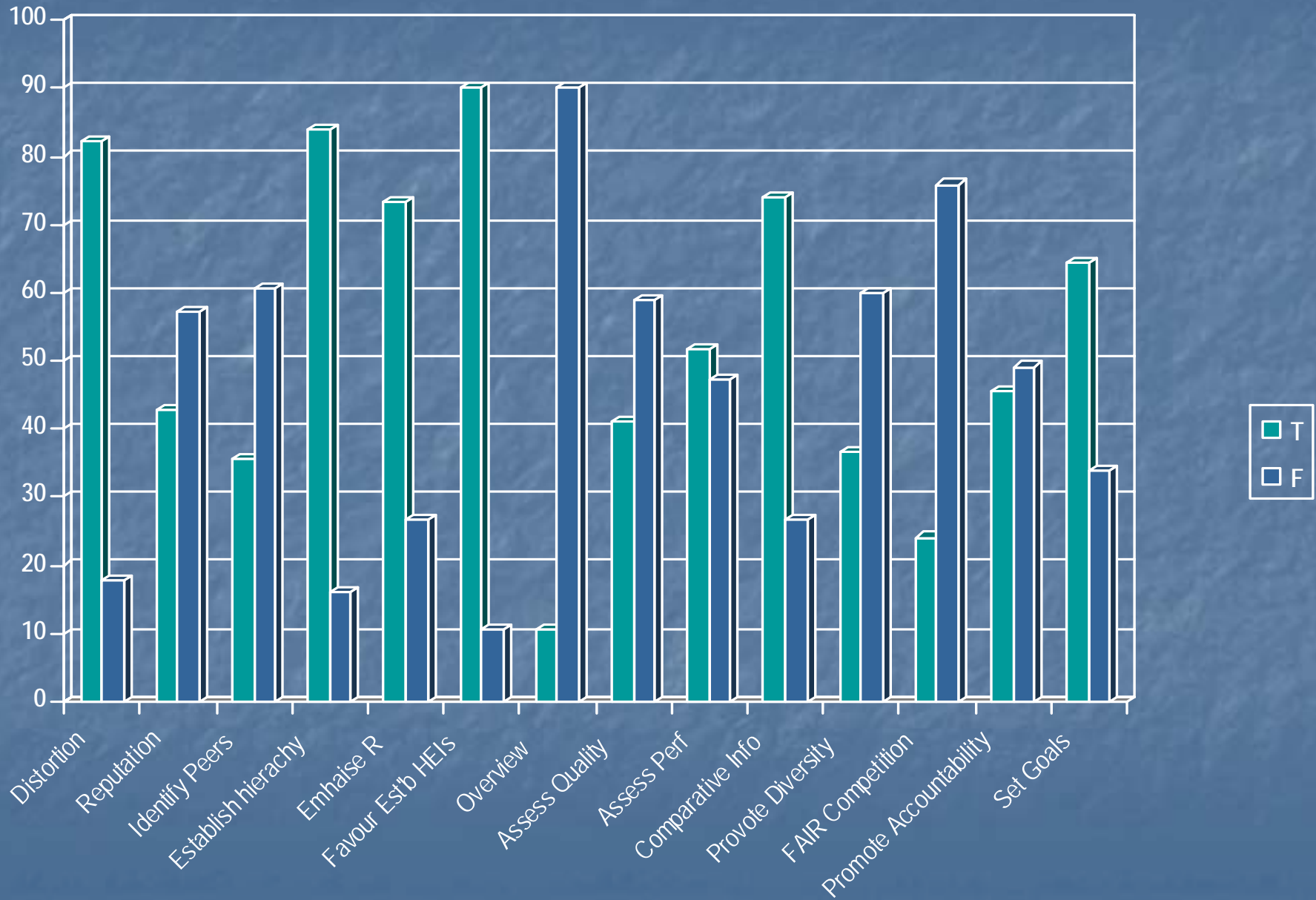


# Influence on Key Stakeholders

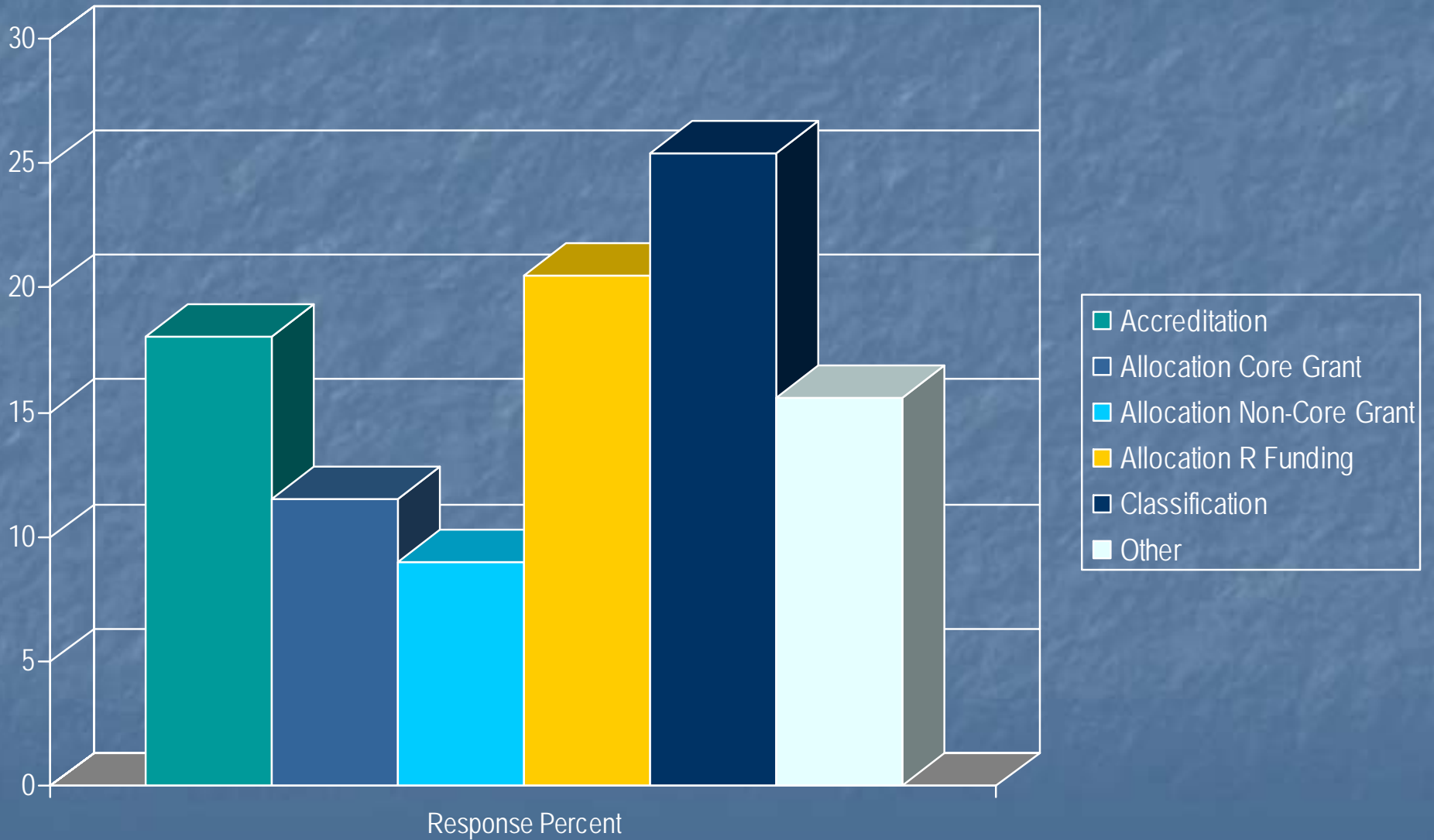
	Examples
Benefactors	'depends on the rank'; More support; 'They feel reassured supporting us'; provides international comparators
Collaborators	'depends on the rank'; 'good for reputation'; 'we feel an improvement'
Current Faculty	'increases awareness about the importance of publishing...'; 'easier to induce improvement with department head whose rankings are declining'
Employers	'depends on the rank'; 'They feel reassured; those not open to us become more receptive'; 'can be confusing'
Funding Agencies	Impact on small part of indicators; 'Have less pretexts to deny funding; and working the Legislative process for our main annual budget improves.'
Future Faculty	'reassurance'; recruitment easier with good reputation
Government	'may believe simplistic picture'; 'local government inclined to spend additional money for an excellent university'
Industry	'depends on the rank: e.g. 'good for reputation' vs. 'less interest'
Parents	'benchmarking for judging best university'; 'particularly in an international market where status and prestige are considered in decision-making'
Partnerships	Good for reputation at international level, reassurance
Students	'high profile students apply to high profile universities'; 'give too much weight...'; influence at the margins

- Influence of ranking on higher education

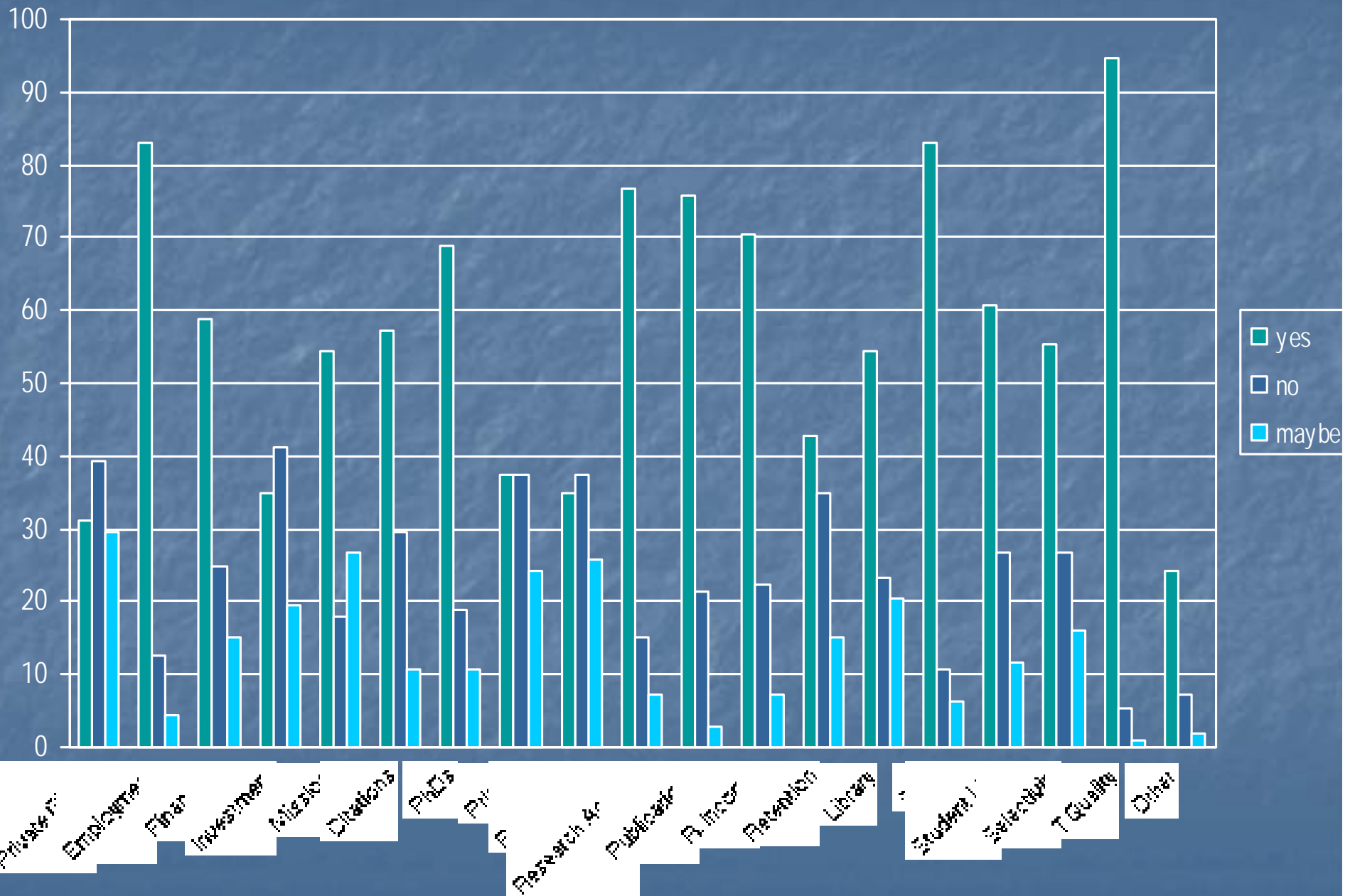
# Impact of LTRS: True or False (N=113)



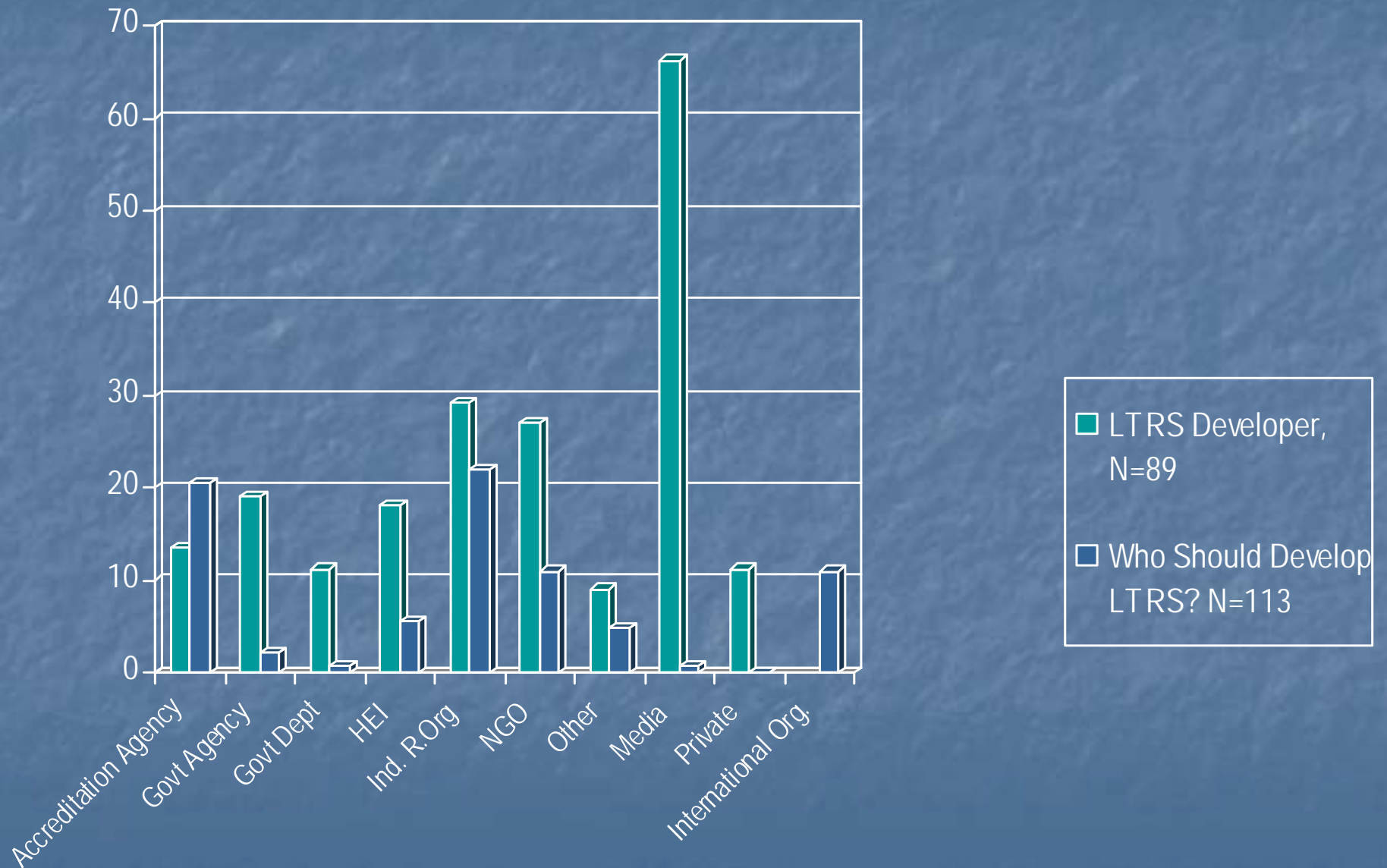
# LTRS Influencing Policymaking? (N=68)



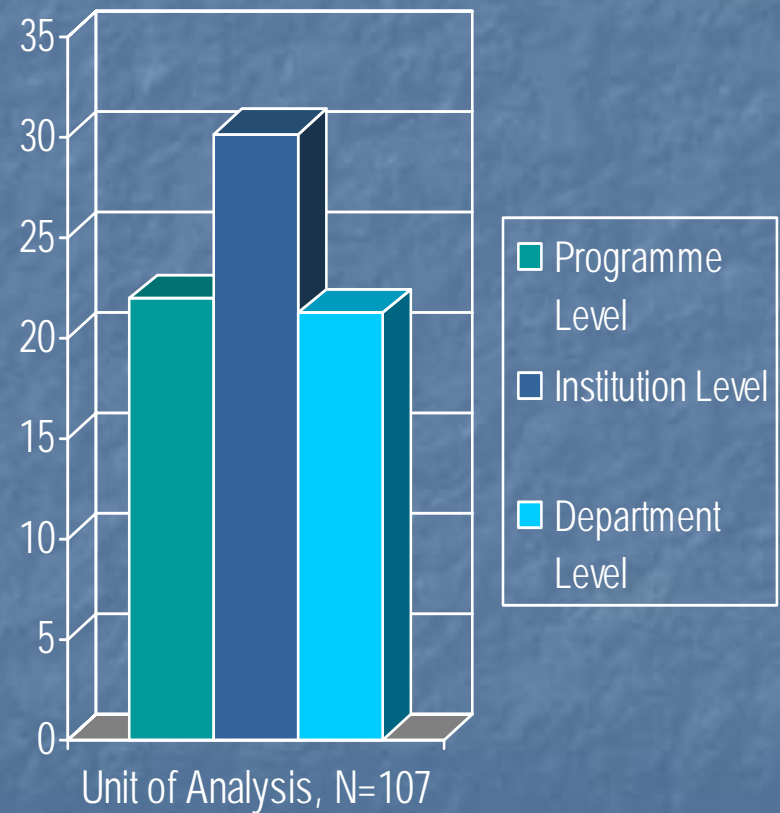
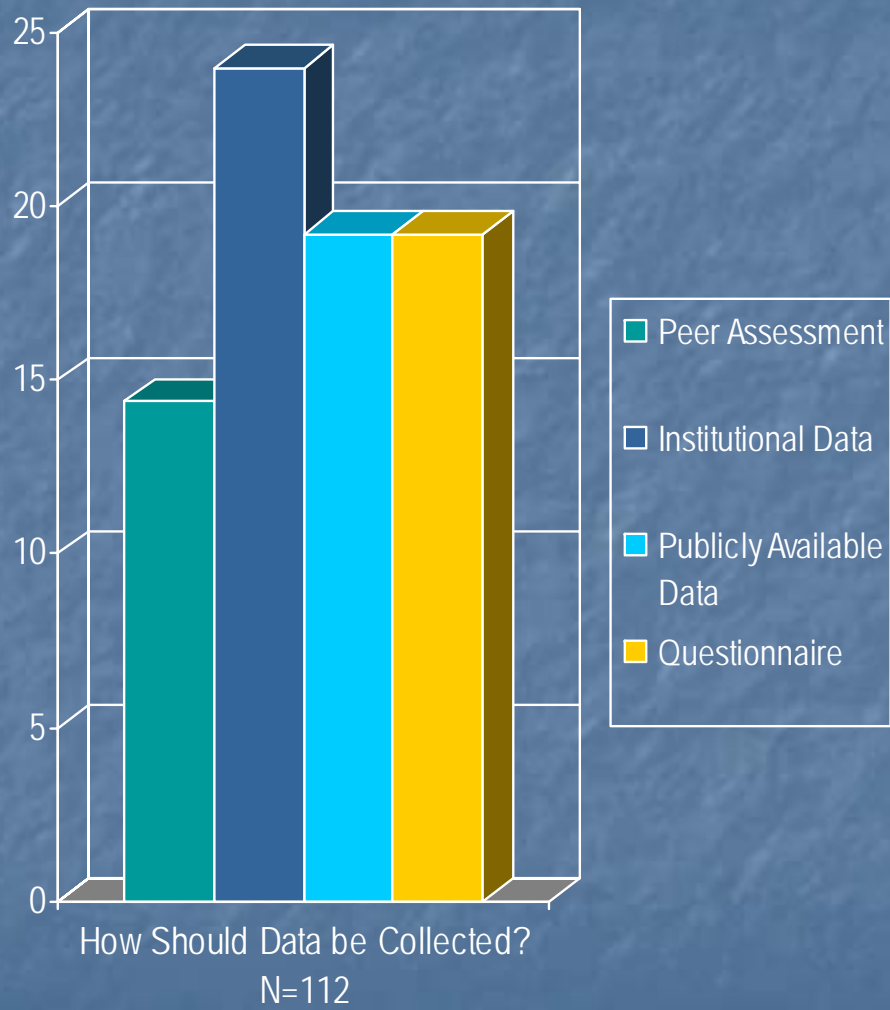
# Ideal Metrics (N=111)



# LTRS Developer vs. Ideal Developer



# Ideal LTRS



# Ideal 'League Table' ?

- Give fair and unbiased picture of the strengths and weaknesses of a university
- Provide student choice for a programme and institution
- Accountability and enhancing quality
- Design and apply practical assessment components and procedures
- Fair(ish) comparison among institutions of similar type (as in the USA)
- Provide comparisons for specific goals

### 3. Observations

# Observations (1)

- Use of national rankings on the rise, but worldwide rankings have wide penetration.
- Significant gap between current and desired rank; respondents want to be within top 25%, nationally and internationally
- Differentiation between target audience and user of LTRS
- While LTRS have helped rather than hindered, replies suggest an reverse reading is possible
  - Institutional 'reputation' can be enhanced depending upon position
  - Key stakeholders are making decisions based on the outcomes
  - LTRS influencing policymaking
  - Institutional response likely to be relative to where positioned and/or whether HEI is content with ranking

# Observations (2)

- Peer-benchmarking forms a critical aspect of both institutional strategic planning, and collaboration and other partnerships
- Despite criticisms of methodology or concept, LTRS are informing institutional decision-making
  - HEIs taking results v seriously, and making changes
- Respondents concerned about wider impact on higher education and higher education policy
  - are open to 'distortion, inaccuracies and obscurities'
  - do not provide a full overview of HEI
  - favour strengths of well-established universities, and emphasize research and postgraduate
  - do little to promote institutional diversity or differentiation
  - do not encourage FAIR competition
- However, can help set strategic planning goals and provide comparative information to students and parents

# Next Steps

- Cross tabulations between institutional profile and various issues –
  - to what extent to these characteristics influence views or tell us about impact on particular types of institutions?
- Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders –
  - to what extent are stakeholders views, opinions and decisions influenced by LTRS?
- Round table with respondents –
  - what more can we learn about the impact and influence of institutional decision-making?

[ellen.hazelkorn@dit.ie](mailto:ellen.hazelkorn@dit.ie)