

Centre for English Language Education

## International collaborations and the effects of rankings

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- Many [institutions] have specialist teams devoted to supplying data to the firms that compile the rankings, and to challenging the positions of rivals. ... High league-table positions feature prominently in marketing pitches, to good effect. ... The bigger question is how useful league tables really are to clients. Defenders say clients routinely dig into the underlying data to identify ... specific expertise. But the tables shed less light on the quality of the service being offered.

(Economist, 2008)

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### Effects of international rankings (1)

- *Potential positive features:*
  - Encourage collaboration with new partners in different parts of the world; Internationally available benchmarking enables institutions to 'look up' the status of a potential partner
  - Refine choices as openly available and clearly defined criteria provide information about potential synergies between providers

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## Effects of international rankings (2)

- *Potential negative features:*
  - An institutional ranking may mask individual discipline strengths (particularly in the Arts and Humanities)
  - ‘Halo’ effects may encourage collaborations that cluster in a group of similarly ranked institutions and HEI authorities in higher ranked Universities discourage collaboration between higher and lower ranked HEIs

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## Defining collaborations

- **[C]ollaborative provision** denotes educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation (QAA, 2004:3).

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**Table 1: A Typology of teaching awards and multi-HEI agreements**

|                           | Partnership agreements   | Collaborative agreements   | Distributed teaching and learning   |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Characteristics</i>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Single HEI governance</li> <li>•Separate HEI delivers teaching</li> <li>•Separate QA required</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Dual or multi-HEI governance</li> <li>•Single, dual or multi-HEI delivery</li> <li>•QA embedded in respective HEI systems</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Single HEI governance</li> <li>•Single HEI delivery (distributed infrastructure)</li> <li>•QA embedded in owning HEI systems</li> </ul> |
| <i>Examples</i>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Franchise</li> <li>Validation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articulation (eg 2+2 programmes)</li> <li>Joint or dual degree</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online modular delivery of award</li> <li>Branch campus/non franchised 'PIM'</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Effect of rankings</i> | Stronger   | Weaker   | Weak or nil   |

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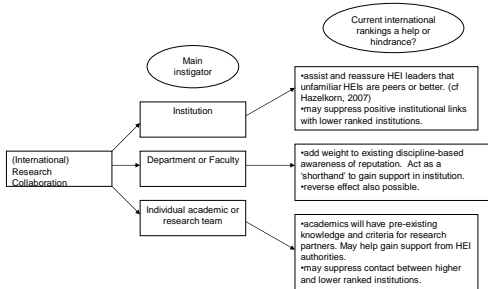
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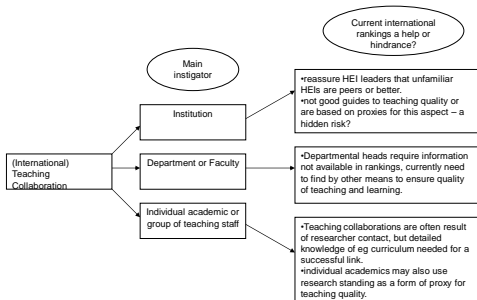
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The University of Nottingham  
**Current rankings and teaching quality**

- Weight esteem factors from the research domain highly (for instance peer review and citation)
- Use quantitative measures as proxies for teaching quality which may or may not be relevant (such as staff-student ratio)
- Use measures that have no predictive power for current or future teaching quality (such as alumni winning Nobel prizes)
- Weight the opinion of students or stakeholders with an interest in the teaching and learning experience such as recruiters or employers as low or nil

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## Conclusion



- Rankings provide a 'snapshot' which different stakeholders in collaborations use differently
- They are most attractive to those who work at a level of generality and who need to manage risk to brand (eg leaders/managers rather than academics *per se*)
- Decisions about collaborations based on rankings will be more reliable for research than for teaching collaborations
- Rankings will be relied on heavily where governance and delivery are separated and...
- ...reliable criteria for teaching collaborations would be highly valued by the HEI market as partnerships can emerge on an *ad hoc* basis currently
- Difficult to incorporate teaching quality criteria into rankings and will tend to be outcome based
- Teaching oriented criteria will need to take into account educational culture across international boundaries

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