A Faustian Contract: Institutional Responses to National and International Rankings

Peter W A West OBE
Secretary to the University

Reputation

“The future battle for world class universities will not be for student numbers but for reputation.”

(Frans van Vught)

- ‘The Best Modern University in the United Kingdom’
- ‘The No 1 Modern University in Scotland’
- ‘Named as one of the top 10 Modern Universities in the United Kingdom’
- ‘University of the Year’
- Auckland, Sydney, City University of Hong Kong

League Tables and European Higher Education

- ‘European HE needs to be modernised. We have global dominance in football, so why not in HE.’
  Commissioner Jan Figel (2/08)

- ‘European HE has only two out of the top 10 in Shanghai tables. Governments can create good universities, not excellent ones.’
  Minister Ziga Turk, Slovenia (2/08)

- ‘The Shanghai rankings show that European HE is, overall, unsuccessful.’
  M. Arnaldo Abruzzini, Euro Chambers (2/08)

- ‘The European university world is not trouble-free and the European universities are not at present globally competitive’
  (European Commission)

- ‘There is a tendency to uniformity and egalitarianism in many national higher education systems; there is too little emphasis on monodisciplinarity and traditional learning and learners; there is too little world-class excellence’
  (European Commission)
Another Vice Anglais?

- Research Assessment Exercise
- The Guardian League Table
- The Sunday Times League Table
- The Times/Good University Guide
- Suspiciously consistent results
- The THES rankings/Shanghai Jiao-Tong
- In-built bias?

Indicators and Weightings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Times Guardian</th>
<th>THES (SQ World)</th>
<th>SJTU (ARWU)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey (NSS)</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>TQA/Subject Review</td>
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<td>Head Teacher Survey</td>
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<td>Entry Standards</td>
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<td>Spending</td>
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<td>Value added</td>
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<td>Good Honours</td>
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<td>Completion/dropout</td>
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<td>Variable~</td>
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<td>Graduate prospects</td>
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<td>Unemployment</td>
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<td>Student:staff ratio</td>
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<td>Recruiter survey</td>
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<td>International students</td>
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<td>Nobel laureates (staff)</td>
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\* Approximate figures; + The SJTU ARWU uses different weightings for institutions that specialise in humanities or social sciences; Teaching 10%, Feedback 5%; ~ bonus/penalty mark

Source: HEFCE

Implications for Universities and Society

- To be able to play their regional role, HEIs must do more than simply educate and research – they must engage with others in their regions, provide opportunities for lifelong learning and contribute to the development of knowledge-intensive jobs which will enable graduates to find local employment and remain in their communities. This has implications for all aspects of these institutions’ activities – teaching, research and service to the community and for the policy and regulatory framework in which they operate.

  Source: IMHE

- Tension between Access and some standards
- Commercialisation/spin outs excluded
- Orthodoxy vs Diversity

Source: HEFCE
Characteristics Valued by Universities

HEFCE SURVEY
- Graduate Job Prospects
- Student Opinions
- Completion Rates
- Retention
- Value Added
- RAE outcome
- Research Income
- PH.D Degrees Awarded

CEIHE SURVEY
- Type of Degree
- Range of Subjects
- Research Intensiveness
- International Orientation

The Impact on the University of Strathclyde
- Pressure to consider an inappropriate merger
- Pressure on our traditional role of ‘Useful Learning’
- Particular difficulty for Faculty of Education
- Impact on perceptions, particularly in S.E. Asia
- After years of ignoring league tables, acceptance that a response is needed
- The Excellence Agenda

League Tables Highly Valued

Improvements:
- CHE System
- OECD Initiative
- CEIHEI Diversity Study
- Subject based approach
QUOTES

‘Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.

David Copperfield

‘Each university must decide what their unique mission is going to be, then aim to be the best in the world at that’

Professor John Hood, Vice-Chancellor, Oxford University, 2006