**EUA Rankings Seminar**

**Brussels, June, 17th, 2011**

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**Introduction and presentation of EUA Rankings Review project**

* Jean-Marc Rapp, EUA President, European University Association (EUA)

Reasons to commission the report:

* rapidly growing number of national and international rankings;
* rapidly growing number of questions from HEIs on how rankings work and how can they adapt to rankings;
* interest from national governments on rankings;
* interest from the European Commission (U-multirank);
* Rankings are here to stay and international rankings have brought universities under public attention and generated future debates on accountability.

**Presentation of EUA Rankings Review Report and its findings by author Professor Andrejs Rauhvargers** *followed by a panel discussion with national and European stakeholders*

The presentation was complemented by the following points:

* Publicly available is not equivalent to easily accessible;
* The executive summary is printed separately, but the report should be read together in order to capture its entire insights;
* Rankings results influence national funds allocation and the structure of universities (mergers).

*Chair*: Lesley Wilson, Secretary General, European University Association (EUA), Brussels, Belgium

* Jan Truszczyński, Director General, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, Belgium

Some of the shortcomings of current rankings need to be addressed. This is the reason why the EC has started the U-multirank project. The rest of the intervention focused on U-multirank, specially on its add on: multidimensionality and democratization.

* Allan Päll, Vice-Chairperson, European Students' Union (ESU), Belgium

The meaning of the numbers is hidden to prospective students.

There is little research on how students take decisions.

Measuring performance is not the way forward if transparency of HEI operations is the aim. It has to be complemented with meaningful qualitative information. The online communities offer opportunities not available in the past.

He encouraged the European Commission to provide also descriptive information in combination, but also without U-multirank.

* Gero Federkeil, Vice-President, International Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG), Belgium

When talking about transparency and rankings one should distinguish between the transparency of rankings and the transparency provided by the rankings.

Different users differ in their capacities to process information and hence to understand the rankings.

He further presented the alternatives offered by IREG: Berlin principles and their operationalization.

The panel was followed by questions from the audience. Some of the relevant interventions are summarized below:

* Bibliometric indicators are a by-product of data bases, which are for profit enterprises;
* A variety of institutions do the rankings. Sometimes national governmental agencies are doing national rankings;
* Media is just using the numbers, not understanding the results;
* A universal usage ranking cannot be developed. It has to be customized for target groups of users;
* Probably an inflation of rankings will break the monopoly of current rankings;
* Composite indicators are not useful for taking strategic decisions.
* Quality assurance cannot be replaced with benchmarking based on rankings; the perspective would be too limited;
* Quality assurance fails to transcend the message what is quality HEI to students;
* Rankings do not allow for student participation;
* Current rankings are attractive due to their simplicity. For more complex rankings there is current no demand, so, if they are to be developed, someone has to pay for that.

**Panel discussion: the impact of ranking on universities**

*Chair*: Ellen Hazelkorn, Vice-President Research and Enterprise, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland

* Jean-Pierre Finance, President, University Henri Poincaré - Nancy I, France

The impact of rankings is two folded: at HEIs’ level they provoked destabilization followed by contestation of the rankings, perceived as a tool for neo-liberal globalization. At governmental level, they became subject of political debate and a base for funding policies.

* Howard Newby, Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom

There is no such thing as an objective ranking. One response to this limitation is to develop rankings for clear purposes. The other response is U-multirank (multidimensionality and democratization).

HEIs manage their position in rankings. There are manipulations: in one ranking ne HEI was moved 50 places up without any methodological reason.

ARWU position is a matter of national/EU pride. Politicians ask why their national systems are not highly situated in ARWU.

Rankings trigger research performance in Europe; they influence mobile students’ choice.

A positive role should be played also in regards to rankings: not only criticize them, but also help rankers improve their methodology.

* Jens Oddershede, Rector, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

More should be known about rankings. What is an university leader: a stakeholder, a customer or a victim?

Rankings made the politicians aware of the international dimension of universities. But HEIs have also a regional dimension which shouldn’t be dismissed from the political agenda.

Rankings have two major shortcomings: a lack of transparency and a too reductionist approach.

Rankings should refer to performance, as output relative to input.

**Chair’s Summary and Closing Remarks**

Rankings are here to stay: is it the hierarchical methodologies or the comparisons between HEIs that are going to stay?

Current rankings are here to stay as long as they sell newspapers;

Current rankings arouse public and political interest.

Rankings are here to stay, but not necessarily as league tables.

Possible follow-ups of the study:

* The effect of rankings
* The fitness for the intended purpose
* Comparisons of rankings with other tools: ratings, benchmarking, quality assurance.