

interview partners noted personal ties and family-related factors, or a specific interest in the history, language, and culture of the host country, as their primary motivations.

Although recent policy rhetoric points to the imperative of attracting academic talent from abroad, concrete measures are lacking and problems with legal salary schemes and legal frameworks for immigration remain largely unsolved. At the same time, we observe that CEE countries have significantly improved their research infrastructure with investments from EU structural funds. Moreover, higher education institutions in CEE countries are increasingly offering courses and programs in foreign languages, usually English, which facilitates the participation of foreign academic staff in educational activities. Additionally, a growing number of individual institutions in CEE countries that struggle to attract international academic staff on a regular employment basis engage in alternative strategies, such as public–private partnerships, which are more attractive to international academic staff due to better remuneration and more time for research activities.

#### **BREXIT AND TRUMP: CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME?**

Increasing populism, nationalist tendencies, and strong public anti-immigration discourses can currently be witnessed in many countries worldwide, and the question of attracting and retaining academic talent to ensure the competitiveness of science and higher education systems in Europe and the United States remains paramount. Especially in light of events such as the 2016 referendum in favor of what is commonly referred to as “Brexit” (the United Kingdom leaving the European Union), and the immigration policy proposed by President Trump in the United States, we assume that the number of academics moving to both countries will decrease. Furthermore, recent reports from the United Kingdom reveal that academics from EU countries have been told by the Home Office to make arrangements to leave the country. As motivations and possibilities for foreign academics to move to and stay in these countries decrease, will this lead to new opportunities for other countries to increase their talent base?

Due to demographic downturn, increased emigration rates, especially of young people, and an aging academic workforce, attracting foreign students and academic staff will become an ever more important aspect to ensure the competitiveness and ultimately the survival of higher education systems in CEE countries. We expect increasing awareness of the importance of changing national and institutional practices and legal frameworks in order to attract international academic staff. Among CEE countries, Estonia stands out as a best-practice example in implementing concrete policies and imposing clear targets at both na-

tional and institutional levels for opening recruitment and attracting foreign academic talent. From EU accession in 2004 to 2014, the share of foreign academic staff in Estonia has increased almost eight-fold, to more than 8 percent. Recently, increased efforts to advertise in *Science* and openly recruit top scientists with significant investments can also be observed in Poland, and we expect other CEE countries to follow this example in the future.

As conditions for recruiting and retaining foreign academic talent are changing in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, new windows of opportunity may open up for Central and Eastern Europe and other countries previously located at the peripheries of higher education. Provided that these countries do not follow the trend towards increasing national isolation, and anticipating that they will follow positive examples in their regions of decreasing barriers for incoming mobility, they might be able to increase significantly the attractiveness of their systems for talented academics from abroad. In such instances, we may witness a significant change of direction in international academic mobility trends. ■

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## Do Rankings Drive Better Performance?

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Global ranking is still only 13 years old, but has already installed itself as a permanent part of international higher education; it has deeply transformed the sector. Global ranking is inevitable. People inside and outside the sector want to understand higher education, and ranking is the simplest way to do so. It maps the pecking order and underpins partnership strategies. It guides investors in research capacity. It shapes the life decisions of many thousands of cross-border students and faculty—despite the patchy quality of much of the data, and the perverse effects of all rankings, good or bad.

Global ranking has remade global higher education as a relational environment, magnifying some potentials

in that environment, and blocking others. It has done so in three ways. First, competition: ranking has burned into the global consciousness the idea of higher education as a competitive market of universities and countries. This competition is about research performance, the main driver of ranking outcomes, and about reputation. Second, hierarchy: ranking is a core element of the system of valuation, whereby unequal weights are assigned to knowledge and to the credentials that graduates take into national and global labor markets. Through ranking, universities become more tightly connected to the political economy, the labor markets, and the unequal societies in which they sit. Third, performance: ranking has installed a performance economy that controls behavior, driving an often frenetic culture of continuous improvement in each institution.

#### UNEQUAL COMPETITION

There are naturally competitive elements in research and in graduate labor markets. But ranking gives competition a more powerful and pristine form, embedding it in indicators and incentives. It makes competition the principal strategy for many university rectors, presidents, and vice-chancellors. Solidarity and cooperation within systems is weakened.

We continue to cooperate, regardless of ranking. The metrics include intellectual collaboration in publishing, though this is often explained as self-interest (joint publication expands citation rates). But the point is that a large and increasing share of the remarkable collective resources in global higher education is allocated to mutual conflict.

Cooperation is further hampered by the hierarchy of value formed in ranking. Though research and learning flow freely across borders, they are not equally valued. There is a clear status hierarchy. What defines this hierarchy is not a global system for valuing credentials or learning. There is no global system for credentials. We do not measure learning on a comparative basis. What systematizes the global hierarchy is the process of codifying, rating, and ranking knowledge, summarized and spread everywhere by global ranking.

Knowledge is ordered by journal metrics and hierarchies, publication metrics, citation metrics and hierarchies, and crowned by rankings, which are largely based on research. Research performance is the whole content of the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Leiden ranking, and Scimago, and more than two thirds of the *Times Higher Education* ranking. Rankings translate the status economy in research into an institutional hierarchy, determining the value of each knowledge producer and, so, determining the value of what they produce. Knowledge metrics and rankings recycle the dominance of the strongest universities.

#### BETTER PERFORMANCE?

What about performance improvement? This is the ultimate rationale for competition. If ranking is grounded in real university performance, and measures the important things about universities, then a better ranking means improved performance. If every university strives for a higher rank, all must be lifting performance. Is this what happens? Yes and no.

The potential is there for a virtuous circle between ranking, strategy, efforts to improve, better performance, then back to better ranking, and so on. But there are problems. Only some university activities are included in ranking. There is no virtuous circle for teaching and learning, a big gap in the performance driver. Many research metrics are inside the virtuous circle, but not in the humanities, the humanistic social sciences, and most professional disciplines, and all scholarly work outside English is excluded. What about science? There, some rankings drive performance, others do not. Rankings that rest on coherent metrics for publication and citation drive more and better research outputs, all else being equal (e.g. ARWU, Leiden, Scimago). Since 2003, research-based rankings have contributed to increased investment in university scientific capacity and elevated research outputs within institutional strategy.

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**Global ranking has remade global higher education as a relational environment, magnifying some potentials in that environment, and blocking others.**

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The picture is more mixed with the *Times Higher Education* and QS rankings. To the extent they draw on strong research metrics, there is the potential for a virtuous circle. Taken alone, the QS indicator for citations per faculty, and the *Times Higher Education* indicators for citations and for research volume, potentially have this effect. “Potentially,” because the incentives are blunted: the research-based indicators are buried within combined multi-indicators.

The internationalization indicators generate incentives to increase numbers of students and faculty from abroad, and joint publications, but are minor within the total ranking—and again, the performance incentive is buried within the other elements in the multi-indicators used.

Therefore, a university may improve its citation per faculty performance, or improve its internationalization numbers, but watch its ranking go down because of what happened in the reputational surveys, which constitute a large

slab of both the *Times Higher Education* and the QS rankings, but are decoupled from real performance. Surveys contain data about opinions about performance, not data about performance. The link between effort, improvement, and ranking, essential to the virtuous circle, is broken. The same happens when the ranking position changes because of small shifts in methodology. Again, there is no coherent link between effort, performance, and ranking.

Wait, you might say, reputation matters to students. The value of degrees is affected by the pecking order. That is right. And a reputational hierarchy based on surveys, by itself, uncontaminated by other factors, does tell us something important. But a reputational ranking alone, while interesting, cannot drive continually improving performance in real terms. It can only drive a position-and-marketing game. In the end, reputation must be grounded in real performance to consistently benefit stakeholders and the public good.

The point can be made by analogy. The winner of the World Cup in football is determined by who scores the most goals within the allotted time on the field. Now what if FIFA changes the rules? Instead of rewarding the final performance alone, who scores the most goals, it decides to give 50 percent to the most goals, and 50 percent to the team believed to be the best, measured by survey. We would all have less trust in the result, wouldn't we?

Multi-indicator rankings provide a large data set, but because the link between effort in each area and the rankings outcome is not transparent, they cannot coherently drive performance. The incentives pull in different directions and the effects are invisible. In ARWU, the different indicators correlate fairly well; they pull in the same direction and share common performance drivers. But QS and *Times Higher Education* use heterogeneous indicators.

On the other hand, if the multi-indicator rankings were disaggregated, the individual indicators could effectively drive performance improvement. Then, at least, ranking competition would be directed towards better outcomes, not reputation for its own sake.

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## Pursuing Rankings in the Age of Massification: For Most—Forget About It

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We have one simple argument: universities around the world, many more than will ever publicly admit it, are currently obsessed with gaining status in one or more national or global rankings of universities. They should quit now.

Although some may succeed in becoming ranked or may improve their numerical scores marginally, it is almost never worth either the resources required, or the substantial changes in mission or academic programs necessary. Indeed, most "gains" are due to methodological changes, introduced by the various rankings to remain in the media and public headlines, and thus commercially lucrative.

Our advice is particularly pertinent for midrange national, regional, and specialist universities and colleges, and their stakeholders and governments. Today, these institutions constitute the overwhelming majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide, due to a combination of demographic demand for participation in higher education, and societal and economic requirements for a more highly educated citizenship. Indeed, projections suggest the number of students enrolled in higher education is forecast to rise from 99.4 million in 2000 to 414.2 million in 2030, an increase of 316 percent. Accommodating these additional students will require more than four major universities (30,000 students) to open every week for the next fifteen years.

These HEIs are the real backbone of society and their locales. They serve as the anchor institution, the mainstay for social and economic growth and development. They will develop some research focus, but are unlikely to become globally prominent.

However, our advice extends even to those universities that adopt the mantle of "flagship"—those at the top of the hierarchy in their country or state. This is because rank-