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New EUA report on rankings:

“Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes: Impact or Illusion?”

The European University Association (EUA) today (6 November) publishes a new report entitled “Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes (RISP): Impact or Illusion?”. The publication, presented at an event in Brussels, is the outcome of a 2.5 year EUA-led project which has carried out the first pan-European study of the impact and influence of rankings on European higher education institutions. The study consisted of three steps, an online survey followed by a series of site visits to institutions and a roundtable with senior university managers and stakeholders. The online survey, which gathered responses from 171 higher education institutions in 39 European countries, confirmed that rankings have an impact on institutions and their activities albeit in a number of different ways.*

For EUA, this study has been a follow-up to its two previous reports on rankings, published respectively in 2011 and 2013, which analysed the methodologies used by the main international rankings. These reports outlined a number of EUA’s concerns with regard to the shortcomings of some of the methodologies used and the potential impact of the rankings. Given that rankings are firmly established in the higher education landscape and their number has risen in recent years, the RISP project set out take EUA’s work on this topic forward by studying in more detail the way rankings are used by universities. It also sought to provide some guidance for universities on how they can constructively use rankings to promote institutional development while also at the same time avoiding certain potential pitfalls that had previously been outlined by EUA.

60% of respondents to the online survey said rankings do play a part in their institutional strategy; however, the way in which rankings play a role varies according to different institutions and contexts. While some respondents were quite specific about the kind of information they were interested in obtaining from rankings (for example information on student satisfaction), others looked into rankings to help plot their general strategic direction.

39% of respondents had used the results of rankings to inform strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions, and another third of respondents were planning to do so. The type of actions that have been influenced included for example the revision of university policies, the prioritisation of some research areas, recruitment criteria, resource allocation, revision of formal procedures, and the creation of departments or programmes. Unsurprisingly, three quarters of respondents used rankings in the context of marketing materials and publicity activities.

The report demonstrated that the vast majority of respondents had set up processes and structures to monitor rankings performance and developments. Rankings have also had an influence on data collection and monitoring of performance within European universities. Approximately three quarters of respondents also said they used rankings to monitor the performance of other universities/institutions.

The report concludes that while the study has demonstrated that rankings can be an important ingredient in strategic planning, it is vital that each university stays “true” to its mission and should not let itself become “diverted or mesmerised” by rankings. For example, universities should not use rankings to inform resource allocation decisions.

It also notes that it will be important for institutions to improve their capacity to generate comprehensive, high-quality data and information to underpin strategic planning and decision-making so as to be able to provide meaningful, comparative information about institutional performance to the public.

The report ends with a series of questions that are designed to help university leaders in developing institutional responses with regard to rankings.

**The Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes (RISP) project is coordinated by EUA in partnership with the Academic Information Centre (AIC, Latvia), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT, Ireland) and the Conférence des présidents d’université (CPU, France). It is supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.*

Ends.

The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

For more information, please contact Andrew Miller, Tel: +32 2 743 11 59, +32 473 748 785, email: andrew.miller@eua.be

The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors’ conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA’s mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.