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Attitudes to Rankings: Comparing German, Australian and Japanese Experiences¹

in Sarjit Kaur, Morshidi Sirat and William G. Tierney (Eds), *Addressing Critical Issues on Quality Assurance and University Rankings in Higher Education in the Asia Pacific*.

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Abstract

Rankings of higher education institutions have become increasingly popular, both at the national and global level, since the late 1990s. Originally promulgated as a consumer tool, providing comparative non-biased information about HE performance, today users include governments, employers, sponsors, and many other stakeholder groups – and their popularity is growing. The EU recently announced its intention to develop its own ‘global’ ranking, and other countries and regions are following suit. Over 45 countries have developed their own national rankings. But how much do we know about the impact and influence of rankings? To date, little has been written about their impact and influence, and that which does draws heavily on the US experience. This chapter provides a different perspective. Drawing on an international survey of HE leaders during 2006, and interviews with HE leaders and stakeholders in Germany, Australia and Japan during 2008, it describes and compares the reaction and response to rankings by HEIs in Germany, Australia and Japan, with particular attention to institutional strategy and planning, benchmarking and quality assurance, student admissions and faculty recruitment and morale. The chapter argues cross-national comparisons/global rankings are an inevitable feature of globalisation, the international battle for talent, and strategies for national competitiveness.

Introduction

As knowledge has displaced capital and labour as the critical ingredient for global competitiveness, the status, quality and productivity of higher education has moved high up the policy agenda. Its transformation from social expenditure to being part of the productive economy has been underpinned by a linear Fordist understanding of knowledge production and innovation. This has situated higher education as the engine of the economy. Whatever about the simplicity of the argument, it has brought additional funding and ‘autonomy’. However, this has come at a price: demands for greater accountability, efficiency and value-for-money; requirements to ‘modernise’ the organisational, management and governance model often referred to as ‘new public management’; increased emphasis on academic outputs – e.g. graduation rates and research activity – which is measurable and comparable; and the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms. In a globalised world, the performance of higher education has taken on geo-political significance, reflected in the rising significance and popularity of global rankings.

Domestic or national rankings were initially viewed as a logical response to satisfy a ‘public demand for transparency and information that institutions and government have not been able to meet on their own’ (Usher & Savino, 2006:38). They were seen to provide investor confidence: a cue to students about the value of their university qualification and a forecast of occupational/salary opportunities; a cue to employers about what they could expect from graduates; a cue to the public because they are independent of the sector and individual universities; and a cue to government and policymakers about the quality and international standards. Global rankings have placed the spotlight on the latter benchmarks, and brought a stridency to government and higher education’s rhetoric. Within months of publication, a major EU meeting was told that Europe was ‘behind not just the US but other economies’ (Dempsey, 2004). This assessment was based on the first Shanghai Jiao Tong *Academic Ranking of World Universities* (2003, henceforth SJT) which showed only 10 European universities among the top 50 compared with 35 for the US.

This reaction is due to a growing recognition that, at a time of accelerating competition for ‘brainpower’ and sources of intellectual property, global rankings are seen to measure the knowledge-producing and talent-catching capacity and attractiveness of higher education. Beyond the traditional audience of students, especially international research students and faculty, the status, quality and productivity of higher education has become a critical factor for mobile capital (OECD, 2009). Thus, rankings do more than provide a framework or lens through which the global economy and national (and supra-national) positioning can be understood. They (appear to) measure national competitiveness as expressed by number of HEIs in top 20, 50 or 100. Yet, for many countries and HEIs, there is a gap between their ambitions and global performance.

Drawing on an international survey of HE leaders and senior managers during 2006, interviews with HE leaders and stakeholders during 2008, and the academic literature, this chapter will describe and compare the reaction and response to rankings in Germany, Australia and Japan². Particular attention will be placed on situating government and higher education response to ranking within a national and global policy framework, and specifically the issues discussed above. By looking at issues of institutional strategy and planning, benchmarking and quality assurance, student and faculty recruitment, the chapter will provide a comparative perspective on the growing popularity of rankings and their influence on the higher education globally. There are three main parts. The opening section is an overview of the rise of rankings and their increasing influence. Part 2 provides a country-by-country description of the attitude and response to rankings in Germany, Australia and Japan, each

section providing a brief overview of the policy environment and attitudes to rankings. Part 3 will summarize the influence of rankings, and discuss how they have helped shape higher education policy.

Global Obsession with Rankings

Global rankings are the latest step in a trend for greater transparency and accountability beginning with college guides which have been popular in the US, UK and Australia for several decades. In the United States, *US News and World Report (USNWR)* began providing consumer-type college-guide information for students and their parents in 1983. The demand for more comparative information, and greater accountability and transparency has intensified ever since. Accreditation procedures have always assessed the quality of what HEIs deliver however over the last decades these processes have acquired more formality, and the results have become public – sometimes published in the newspapers and referred to as ‘league tables’. The focus is usually on teaching and learning and/or research, either at the subject/discipline level but also at the institutional level. Benchmarking has transformed these processes into a strategic tool, helping HE leaders and governments to compare systematically the practice and performance with peer institutions or countries.

National rankings, most often developed and promulgated by private media organisations, have taken accountability and transparency to another level – comparing HEIs using a range of indicators and weightings. Today, national rankings exist in over 40 countries. Global rankings were the next logical step; in a globalised world, cross-national comparisons are a product whose time has come. SJT began in 2003, followed by *Webometrics* and *Times QS World University Ranking* in 2004, the *Taiwan Performance Ranking of Scientific Papers for Research Universities* in 2007, and *USNWR’s World’s Best Colleges and Universities* in 2008. The Russian agency, RatER (2009), has just published its *Global University Rankings*, and the EU (2008) has announced a ‘new multi-dimensional university ranking system with global outreach’ to be piloted in 2010.

Initially, students and their parents were considered the prime target audience, providing key information on the conversion potential of a qualification for occupational opportunities and personal attainment, e.g. salary range. Today, rankings are used by a growing group of stakeholders, including HEIs themselves. Others include government and government agencies, industrial partners and employers, sponsors and private investors, peer HEIs, alumni and prospective professors and faculty. Because rankings are either produced by media organisations or receive media attention, public opinion can be an important stakeholder. Research is still emerging about how these different stakeholders use rankings to inform their choices, decisions and actions. More information is available from the US given their longevity but similar trends are evident around the world as this chapter illustrates (Hazelkorn, 2007, 2008, 2009a).

The marketisation of higher education has transformed students into savvy consumers, customers or clients. Students use rankings to help short-list or verify their choice rather than determine their choice, although this is dependent upon their qualification level, ability and socio-cultural aspirations. Undergraduate students are less influenced by rankings because they prefer a college or university geographically proximate to them, in contrast to postgraduate students who comprise the growing number of internationally mobile students (Guruz, 2008). The latter are more responsive to worldwide rankings given their maturity, career focus and capacity for mobility, in addition to increasing national and institutional

desire to recruit these students who can help shore up national research and economic development strategies.

Regardless of misgivings and criticism about rankings, HEIs widely believe rankings enable them to build, maintain or elevate their reputation and profile (nationally and internationally); that students use rankings to inform their choices, especially at the postgraduate level; and that stakeholders use rankings to influence their decisions about funding, sponsorship and employee recruitment. According to a 2006 international survey, 63% of HE leaders said they had taken strategic, organisational, managerial or academic action on the basis of ranking information; only 8% said they had taken no action (Hazelkorn, 2008:199). Rankings are carefully analysed and mapped against actual performance to identify strengths and weaknesses, set goals, define performance indicators, and aid resource allocation. In turn, the metrics are used to fix targets for individual department/units. Rankings provide the evidence for making significant changes, e.g. re-organisation, professionalization of decision-making and service provision or changes in academic work practices. For many HEIs, rankings have a QA function. And there is growing evidence that rankings are influencing priorities.

Governments and policymakers are cautious about indicating the extent to which rankings inform actual decisions. More often, they cite the SJT rather than the Times QS as the measure of competitiveness and national ambition, but there is no consistent pattern. Rankings often underpin statements or initiatives to encourage higher education to become more competitive and responsive to the marketplace and customers, to define a distinctive mission, to be more efficient or productive, and to become world-class. World-class HEIs are publicized as a symbol of national pride and used as an indicator of economic dynamism to encourage investment. The various excellence initiatives, which have included merging universities to enhance the research capacity/capability, are good examples (Salmi, 2009:85-92). Because of the importance of human capital as the predictor for knowledge creation, rankings are used to underpin decisions about HE scholarships, recognition of qualifications and, more recently, immigration policy.

Employers have long recognised the advantages of recruitment from specified institutions. SMEs and local employers have an implicit ranking of institutions based on their own experiences which can be self-perpetuating while larger international businesses and professional organisations tend to be more 'systematic'. There is much less evidence about how sponsors and private investors respond to rankings, but because HEIs are now seeking to diversify their income sources this is an important area to watch. Boeing is developing its own ranking in order to indicate which colleges produce workers it considers most valuable because it wants 'more than just subjective information' and 'facts and data' (Basken, 2008). Monks and Ehrenberg (1999:6) note a strong correlation in the US between high rankings and/or an improvement in position and increases in endowment per student. Other US evidence suggests alumni, who have a natural interest and may be potential benefactors, can be influenced by rankings.

The growing significance of benchmarking, and cross-national collaboration for educational programmes and research has transformed rankings into a strategic tool. Over 76% of HE leaders said they monitored the performance of other institutions in their country, and almost 50% said they observed peer institutions worldwide. Over 40% admitted that such assessment were integral to decisions about whether to enter collaborations and which ones, while 57% said they thought rankings were influencing the willingness of other HEIs to partner with them. Respondents said there was pressure to 'establish contact with reputed universities' while many 'international partners accept only universities above a certain level in rankings' (Hazelkorn, 2007:100-101).

Finally, faculty are not immune to the perceived effects or benefits of rankings. HEIs headhunt professors with significant research or HiCi reputations as adding value to both the reputation of the institution and to its rank. In turn, faculty are conscious about the professional capital that rankings transmit. Organisationally, good rankings can have a positive impact on faculty morale and academic behaviour. Conversely, poor rankings can impact negatively and induce good performers to leave.

Attitudes to Rankings

The next section presents the results from interviews with HE leaders and senior administrators, plus faculty and students in Germany, Japan and Australia. It aims to illustrate the extent to which rankings are impacting on and influencing academic decision-making and behavior.

Germany

Germany's perception of its universities as the bedrock of the modern university stretching back to Humboldt and the world's scientific engine was shattered with the first publication of the SJT rankings in 2003 which showed only 5 German universities among the top 100. Rising to six in recent years, the German government has sought to promote top-level science and research through the creation of a German 'Ivy League' and focus on internationally renowned publications/research activities, and in so doing to reclaim Germany's historic leadership position in research (Chambers, 2007). The *Exzellenzinitiative* (Initiative for Excellence) was introduced in June 2005 to promote world-class excellence through competition and a vertically differentiated system. A total of €1.9b was earmarked from 2006 to 2011 for three initiatives: Graduate schools, Excellence Clusters and Institutional Strategic Development, the latter preserved for universities successful in both of the other competitions. This represents a significant change from its previous commitment to egalitarianism, whereby all universities were broadly similar.

German policy is strongly influenced by EU strategies which aim to make the EU 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world...by 2010' (EU, 2000). The gap between these ambitions and the 'perceived' poor standing of European universities is mirrored by the German response. At the same time, the Bologna Process, which seeks to harmonize qualifications across Europe, is driving competition and destabilizing the traditional binary system: universities and Fachhochschulen. By removing historic and elite barriers between institutions, HEIs now find themselves competing with each other in their own and other countries. The fact that students can/will move easily across boundaries places greater power in their hands. The popularity and extension of the CHE ranking (see below) is recognition that rankings are an enabler of mobility and competition.

Although CHE rankings have existed since 1998, ranking consciousness has risen sharply in Germany since the emergence of global rankings and the introduction of the *Exzellenzinitiative*, which is itself perceived and used as a ranking. One university which did not perform well in the first round was asked 'are you not excellent anymore' while another hoped its 'success in the Excellence Initiative' would enable strengthen its CHE positioning – reflecting the common view that rankings impact on reputation. This view is held by both universities and Fachhochschulen. Thus rankings are regularly discussed within the senior leadership team, and several HEIs indicated they have compiled a comprehensive analysis of rankings which serves several functions: strategic benchmarking, identifying targets and/or actions, monitoring peer performance and public comment: 'we look at the rankings and the

results and of course we look into the different disciplines'. While the level of scrutiny varies, all HEIs watch rankings carefully regardless of whether they feature or not: we 'must take rankings into account, because others do.'

HEIs are also looking carefully and critically at their organisational structure and practice, using rankings to identify 'best practice' among peers. This could involve new research structures, e.g. interdisciplinary centres or institutes, re-organising departments and/or merging small units into larger ones to enhance visibility and critical mass – albeit achieving greater efficiency is also a driver. A common theme is the establishment/expansion of marketing, international and public affairs offices, including 'in our advertisement the ranking results if they are favourable'. The professionalization of HE management is a clear effect, resulting in the appointment of marketing personnel with experience gained in the 'real' world and employment of 'change management' consultants.

It is obvious that the future structure of the university, over the next five or ten years will be different. There will be faculties weakening and others getting more important and getting more money and getting more visibility.

The wind of change is felt across HEIs, even if the leadership is reluctant to admit to the full scale of the transformation felt by faculty.

Rankings are also used to identify good and weak performance, influencing the development/adoption of QA processes in Germany, which is at an earlier stage than other jurisdictions. There is a parallel discussion about the importance of accreditation. QA differs from both accreditation and rankings but all are regarded as critical reputation builders. Rankings are also used as internal benchmarks, on the basis it makes sense to adopt metrics used by external organisations for internal purposes. Performance is influencing resource allocation models fuelling a 'battle about finances within the department', although in some instances it is 'faculty who are weak [who] are getting more resources to improve'.

Rankings-consciousness amongst faculty is attributable to growing emphasis placed on monitoring and rewarding performance, and specifically on research and its outputs, e.g. publishing in specific journals and standardizing institutional referencing. Authors of peer reviewed papers are often financially rewarded. Thus, rankings are a topic at department/faculty meetings and in social conversation.

While many factors combine to affect reputation, the 'quality' of faculty is critical. German rectors, who now have a direct role in recruitment, are focusing much more attention on headhunting high-achievers. International recruitment is foremost, with advertisements be placed in English to attract the widest range of candidates; failure in one HEI to do so met with the sharp criticism that 'practices within the faculties need to change'. This approach works both ways; one rector acknowledged, 'I'm quite sure our ranking is very important for applicants'. This more competitive or 'meritocratic' environment is affecting contracts and salaries. Individual faculty may earn bonuses or performance-related pay depending upon research success – but the reverse is also true.

...in many cases we have made some type of agreement saying if you will have gained funding lets €200,000 for the next three years we will give €500 per month, more.

Other universities have publication incentives, paying researchers for high-impact publications. These practices are challenging the traditional 'power' of the professoriate and individual professors.

Competition for high-achieving students is also heating up. CHE rankings are an important influence on undergraduate domestic students albeit most German students attend their nearest university. This is beginning to change. For domestic students, ranking-consciousness increases at university; in other words, they become aware of the 'standing' of their institution, and if the HEI is highly regarded, they feel a sense of pride and confidence. But students in low ranked institutions fear the reverse may be true; they are suspicious of rankings and concerned about the future of their institutions and their own future. Regardless, rankings will inform their choice for post-graduate study. All HEIs believe rankings are a critical factor influencing the choice of international students – not only of which institution but also which country. Given expectation of a demographic down-turn after 2015, more attention is focused on international students – and hence rankings are a vital factor.

There is little hard evidence on how rankings influence employers, and graduate employment opportunities. Rankings especially influence larger, international employers, who are anxious to 'attract people from the right universities into their companies and so and they say they need these numbers'. Thus, universities say that they 'are very interested in rankings because the companies are looking at rankings.'

Japan

Since 2000, the Japanese government has introduced a series of legislative and policy initiatives to increase institutional autonomy and management capabilities, enhance evaluation and emphasizing quality, and develop internationally-competitive research via Centres of Excellence and Global Centres of Excellence, and Graduate Schools (Oba, 2007). It hopes this will transform higher education, replacing traditional public/private distinctions with differentiation based on market-sensitive profiles, emphasizing teaching, research and/or community service, along international/national/regional lines. The reforms have coincided with the emergence of global rankings and in turn, rankings have given a further impetus to the process of modernisation. According to the 2008 *Times QS* or *SJT*, Japan has either 10 or 9 universities, respectively, in the top 200 and is ranked 5th in the world. But if the *Times QS* data is controlled for population or GDP, it falls to 18th (Beerrens, n.d.). This situation poses yet another gap between ambition and reality.

Japan, like Germany, is facing a demographic transformation – declining numbers of prospective HE students and increasing numbers of older people – and a financial crunch at a time when global competition is demanding greater investment in higher education, especially in RDI. Previously protected by geography from the full effect of competition, Japan's universities are facing considerable pressure and urgency to reform and modernise. In an effort to overcome some of these problems, the government is seeking to increase the number of international students from the current 100,000 to 300,000 by 2020. The government hopes the new internationally competitive research environment will attract outstanding researchers from abroad.

To date, the most popular ranking has been the *Daigaku* [University] *Ranking*. Produced since 1994 by *Asahi Shimbun*, a leading newspaper, it provides broad information about Japanese universities to students preparing for entrance examinations (Yonezawa et al, 2002). In contrast to other rankings, it collects 70+ indicators but does not aggregate the result into a single digit. Another ranking, being developed by the *Yomiuri*, reflects the government's attention to quality assurance and faculty development issues. Titled the 'Ability of the university - attempts to improve the quality of education', it aims to gather information by questionnaires to public and private 4-year universities.

The rising influence of global rankings in Japan coincides with increasing inter-institutional and inter-national competition. HE leaders, senior faculty and international offices are keenly attuned to the new competitive climate, which is partly spearheaded by government reform, although they face considerable challenges getting their institutions into shape. They often refer to their ranked position in speeches to students or new faculty, or with other stakeholders. In other words, rankings are used to promote the university, both internally and externally – when they are positive.

We all want to see our university ranked higher and higher, that should be also shared by the faculty members and students and probably the citizens of ... yet we don't have any sort of specific target and exactly where we want to rank ourselves. All I can say is that we want to be higher and higher, you know.

They usually refer to the Times QS rather than the SJT despite concern with the former's bias 'towards British and Commonwealth institutes, including Canadian and Australian', the English language and bibliometric data. In contrast, HE leaders believe the government is most influenced by the SJT, even though 'they do not put out any official comment'. They believe the government uses them to help decide the 'allocation of public funds for universities' and that universities with good rankings receive better attention from the government. The influence of rankings extends to the local community and employers. Like Germany, international companies are more familiar with global rankings while domestic companies are sensitive to domestic rankings.

Accordingly, HE leaders use rankings 'as a kind of technique to improve performance...it's an ambivalent situation'. They deny being 'controlled' by rankings, but this depends upon whether the university is dependent upon the government (national universities) or student tuition (private universities) for the majority of their funding. The former group are likely to use rankings to lobby for additional money, whereas the 'satisfaction of the student is much more important' for the latter group. Nevertheless, universities are very aware of how rankings can be used to raise institutional profile and identify peers institutions, e.g. for research or other partnerships. How rankings are used 'differs from university to university'.

For newer regional universities, rankings have brought visibility. For them, it is not just about being highly-ranked; it is also about being recognized. Many university leaders, at all levels in the popularity stakes (also in Germany and Australia), commented that rankings made their institution better-known both nationally and internationally. While some universities vie for high rank, for many others just being mentioned can be beneficial – helping to overcome local bias or tradition.

As a consequence, HE leaders and their senior teams are developing strategic plans, albeit this process appears to be at a relatively early stage in most universities. Many have sophisticated processes/methods for reviewing the rankings, either by the President or VP International Relations, and they are developing/expanding their fundraising skills to help fund these ambitions. Many HEIs anticipate that the government will do what's necessary to ensure the Universities of Tokyo and Kyoto remain competitive vis-à-vis Beijing U, National U of Singapore or Seoul National U – whose governments are investing considerable sums.

Japanese HEIs are becoming more strategic, identifying research strengths and niche competences, reviewing resource allocation and adapting the curriculum accordingly. This involves building up science and technology disciplines, e.g. medicine, engineering, environmental sciences, life sciences – especially at postgraduate level; developing post-graduate activities to attract international faculty and students; improving teaching quality; and expanding the number of courses taught in English:

We are in the process of enriching programs for foreign students, including increasing the number of courses taught in English, providing assistance for smoother settlement in Japan, etc. We are also expanding exchange programs with globally prominent institutes, including Harvard and Yale.

The strategy includes recruiting more ‘gifted’ international students and high-achieving internationally-focused faculty.

Institutional flexibility allowed under new ‘incorporation’ legislation (introduced 1 April 2004) permits universities to offer distinctive tenure arrangements and salary packages to entice internationally-competitive scholars. One university is targeting scholars through the readership of *Science* and *Nature* (which are used by SJT), and aims to recruit 60% of new faculty through such public advertisements. It is also offering exceptional scholars twice the basic salary based on performance; others universities have similar initiatives. There is a big emphasis on English-language publication:

...we can write excellent papers in Japanese but that is almost nothing. People outside Japan can’t read it therefore so that the faculty members should have the language skills so that they can write papers in say English for instance.

Even for international scholars, knowledge of Japanese is not required because these scholars will teach at the postgraduate level, with international or internationally-minded students.

At the national level, student recruitment campaigns are becoming evident with universities using scholarships and admissions tests to target high-achieving students – a situation which is likely to increase as the number of domestic students declines. Japanese students have tended to rely on a combination of local intelligence and entrance scores rather than any of the national rankings – e.g. the more difficult a university is to enter, the better it is seen to be – is likely to change.

...in theory all high school graduate can be accepted to a university. But some students are more academically orientated, they want to go to better universities and in that sense the high school students will look into the rankings to choose and of course the universities would like to have good students, so [the] university has all good reasons why they should,...place itself higher in ranking.

In contrast, international students are attuned to rankings and used them to identify the ‘best university’ in Japan. They are especially conscious that ‘graduates from high ranked universities are better regarded in the workplace’ which can help guarantee them employment upon return home.

Australia

As a major student-importing country, Australia may attract only 6% of the all international students but international students constituted 17.8% of all tertiary students or 19.7% of Tertiary Type A students in 2006 (OECD, 2008, 79-80; 356, 366.). In some universities, international students comprise over 50% of total students. This fact is both a cause of celebration and anxiety, the latter due to an over-reliance on international students income which has replaced the 27% decline in government funding per student from 1995-2004, at a time when capacity is growing in student-exporting countries especially at the undergraduate level. The former is recognition that education is now the third largest export sector in Australia just behind coal and iron ore, representing an A\$13.7billion industry. In 2007, tuition fees accounted for 39 per cent of overseas student expenditure in Australia, with the

balance spent by foreign students on goods and services, such as food, accommodation, transport and entertainment.³

These factors explain why the global positioning of Australian higher education has encouraged a pre-occupation with rankings among HEIs and commentators. This hype is reflected in the amount of coverage and commentary in newspapers and on-line publications regarding the position of Australian higher education.⁴ The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research's *Index of the International Standing of Australian Universities* uses a range of data to overcome problems associated with the SJT, while domestic students refer to *The Good Universities Guide* which is not a ranking but a rating system.

Ranking-consciousness is strong among HE leadership, with the prevalent belief that 'rankings are here to stay' and that they represent 'external recognition'. Planning/marketing departments take an almost microscopic interest in rankings and many universities maintain a preferred ranking-designation. In several instances, detailed mapping and tracking exercises had been undertaken indicating where the university stands vis-à-vis the various metrics. Most universities engage in regular reportage and discussion by the senior team, and public announcements or critiques by the Vice-Chancellor. Many faculty also report discussion at departmental level. The overall effect is to inculcate ranking-consciousness throughout the organisation.

Concern about the impact of rankings is felt across the system, amongst top-ranked and not-ranked universities. The former are fearful of 'falling from grace' while the latter are concerned about their 'ability to survive in a competitive international student market'. The very public mauling of Macquarie University when it plummeted from 82 to 168 in the 2007 *Times QS Ranking* presents a cautious tale (Alexander and Noon, 2007). Nevertheless, this has not stopped universities using rankings as a political lever to lobby: we 'use whatever accolades [we] have and ignore everything else'. Various HEIs recognize the double-edged potential of this strategy: '...you could in a perverse way argue that it's a disadvantage to be ranked too highly' because government may look to spend funding elsewhere' – which is effectively what the new Labor government has chosen to do.

Rankings have encouraged/forced universities to focus greater attention on quality and performance. They are regularly used as a benchmarking mechanism, from which university leaders and planners 'play against a basket [of rankings] and link it to your mission'. They are a 'rod for management's back', providing evidence for change despite questions over the methodologies.

...the fact that you can link an international student driver and a domestic research driver and a government agenda and a philanthropist all through the one mechanism is quite a powerful tool in the arsenal of management and so I actually think it's been good for the sector in being able to drive change and create a vehicle or a discussion point that then gives management more impetus...

Yet rankings present challenges; they may enable leaders to drive change within their organisation but they are also affecting and influencing relationships between institutions. Membership of global HE networks is considered vital to overcome geographic isolation. Rankings can aid this process, enabling internationalisation of the 'brand', exchange programmes for faculty and students, and crucially research partnerships. But it works both ways: 'you think about doing research with someone at a school that was ranked...below you.'

Similarly, international students are influenced by rankings, which are used as a short-listing device in the absence of local intelligence or networks. Students ‘might know about Australia, but not where to go in Australia’. Universities report rankings have helped raise their profile among international students and agents. ‘Since global rankings have appeared, we are receiving an increasing number of foreign delegations’ and applications. At the same time, universities use rankings to assess the suitability of applicants, especially international students at the postgraduate level – ‘so we’re as guilty’.

Faculty at all HEIs are concerned rankings are impacting on a wide range of academic matters, including curriculum. The reputation race is proving to be a disincentive for matriculation between HEIs or revising curriculum when competitors are spending time building up research. Concern is also expressed about ‘driving negative decision making’ or ‘losing out’.

Across all universities, faculty believe rankings are more influential than vice chancellors acknowledge, contributing to ‘a surveillance culture.’

In my department, it has had an impact on allocation of duties by heads of department with emphasis on giving some degree of lesser teaching to people who come up in the metrics as high productivity researchers...

I think the university needs to calm down. We’ve had two career panic days; its what I call them where they’re like Communist training sessions where everyone has to stand up and say what they are doing to improve their career.

Faculty feel pressure to publish in specifically named journals – sometimes with ‘hard cash on the table for anyone who gets one of those articles’ – or negatively on professional disciplines, e.g. engineering, business and education, which do not have a strong tradition of peer-reviewed publications. Because contracts are set at the ‘enterprise’ level, each university can set targets appropriate to its own ambitions. There is a close resemblance to the metrics that drive rankings. There is also concern that this approach is prioritizing mid-career scholars, with good research records, adversely affecting the recruitment of post-docs and younger scholars, and women. Faculty have been ‘sacked who weren’t doing any research’. The over-all affect is to generate a great sense of pride if the university does well but anger or shame if the contrary occurs.

Discussion

The initial frenzy about global rankings may have passed but they have left a lasting and influential legacy on higher education and policy. In many ways, rankings are a metaphor for globalisation; indeed, in a globalised world, rankings as a form of cross-national/cross-jurisdictional comparisons are inevitable. They have accelerated competition between HEIs, and between countries. Regardless of size and mission, few HEIs are untouched by their impact. Rankings are encouraging and influencing the modernisation and rationalisation of institutions, the professionalization of services and marketisation of higher education, the research mission and fields of investigation, curriculum and disciplines, faculty recruitment and new career/contractual arrangements, and student choice and employment opportunities. They have a public accountability role, forcing compliance and adoption of ‘good practice’. This is widely appreciated across the sector, from management, to faculty, to students – all of whom attribute changes in attitude and policies to the results of rankings. A good example is how the Australian National Union of Student’s survey of university support for student councils forced an immediate (positive) reaction from formally reluctant vice-chancellors (NUS, 2007). Teaching and learning rankings have a similar effect: ‘Now degrees are more

portable, competing with other universities and comparing their models makes for better universities'. By essentially 'naming and shaming', rankings have forced universities to respond in ways which other less public actions may not have done.

But as global competition intensifies and demographic change shrinks the number of (traditional) students, rankings do more than build brand awareness. Evidence from Germany, Japan and Australia suggests that rankings are helping reshape higher education. While many of changes reflect normal competitive, rationalisation or sound academic reasons, there is a strong correlation between them and the indicators and weightings used by ranking systems. This has led to concern that HEIs are going 'through the subtleties of the rules and...orient everything that was happening in the university to gaming the system.' (Hazelkorn, 2009a and 2009b; Ishikawa, 2009). For example, the biosciences are seen to benefit vis-à-vis the arts or humanities because their outputs are more easily recorded in traditional bibliometric processes and they are seen as a vital 'driver' of economic growth and innovation. As one interviewee commented: To survive 'art and philosophy must find ways to connect to natural sciences which is our new strategic focus'. High-achieving students are more highly prized because they complete in a timely fashion and progress more readily to employment – which are often key metrics. Not only governments but also HEIs have recognised the ranked premium that can arise when two or more universities merge.

The main differences between the target countries are not at the institutional level but at the policy level, and the extent to which rankings are an explicit or implicit driver of change.

Inter-institutional competition has been rare in Germany heretofore. Students – with exception as to some disciplines and geographic preference – have attended the university closest to home, and all graduates have been perceived as equal – with the exception of the distinction between universities and Fachhochschulen. This has changed because the current government believes that greater competition and vertical differentiation will enhance quality and excellence: 'Very clearly the Excellence Initiative came from the observation...that German universities were not named in the Shanghai ranking'. These changes have been broadly welcomed by HE leaders, and some faculty and student because competition is broadly equated with modernization and global rankings with national pride. But, the emphasis on elite institutions and differential funding/investment strategies has aggravated existing east-west and north-south differentials. Students and faculty at universities in the former East Germany are especially concerned: 'Some departments and programmes may get left behind as a result of increased focus on and funding of the best programmes'. These developments are reconfiguring German higher education, and are likely to lead to mergers, including between universities and research institutes, e.g. Max Planck and Fraunhofer. This is driven by the desire to include the latter's extensive research portfolio in ranking calculations, because they focus exclusively on universities. As research and education transcend national boundaries, regional collaboration and mergers become more likely.

In Japan, rankings are also an affirmation of status and prestige. Their growing influence occurs at a time when the 'vacuum of elite education, wariness over egalitarianism...and an unfulfilled sense of entitlement among winners' was generating tension within the system and vis-a-vis Japan's neighbours and natural competitors (Ishikawa, 2009, p9). This may account for little opposition to the government's aim to promote/identify 30 top world-class universities – in order to retain high-achieving Japanese students and attract international students. The major challenge is the extent to which Japanese universities can change fast enough to compete globally. This is not simply a question of investment but changing from a government-regulated system into one with autonomous, strategic, competitive and distinctive universities. This requires a reorganisation of the system including 'the...[closing] down some

regional and private universities and direct[ing] money to the major universities'. Rankings also highlight the preparedness of individual universities: is there a strategic vision? can the faculty operate at the appropriate level? What changes are required? Faculty age is an important factor, as well as traditional recruitment processes and expectations. But readying Japanese higher education for an influx of international students means upgrading campuses, and transforming programmes and activities into English – even though over 92% of foreign students come from Asia, of which 60% are Chinese and 15% Korean (JSSO, 2007):

English speaking universities are highly ranked but almost all the Japanese universities are managed in Japanese and taught in Japanese... so we guess that's why in general Japanese universities are ranked relatively low.

This means concentrating/focusing resources on a select range of scientific fields to the relative neglect of the humanities and social sciences which are more likely to be taught and researched through Japanese.

Australian higher education is accustomed to operating in a competitive environment, domestically and globally. The former has been fostered by government policy, pushing universities to earn an increasing share of their funding through international recruitment and performance measurements. Rankings have introduced new dynamic reawakening arguments about the 1989 decision to establish a unitary system amid concerns that Australia lacks 'truly stellar research universities,...now seen as vital attractors of human, intellectual and financial capital in a knowledge economy' (Marginson, 2008, p2). This view had more political support under the previous Howard government. The new Australian Labor party has signaled a remarkable volte face. Whereas the previous government spoke of the need for 'More of our universities...to be within the top 100 internationally and...some...to aspire to the top 10' (Bishop, 2007, p3), the current government speaks of wanting the entire 'higher education system to be world-class so wherever students are in this country, whatever institution they're at, they're getting a world-class education' (Gillard, 2008) This view was endorsed in the *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* (2008:124), which did not mention the word 'rankings' but rather nevertheless linked international recruitment with the system's world-class status. It might be possible to balance the pursuit of equity with research excellence through the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA), the new research assessment exercise. Because every university in Australia is exposed to the international market, changes affecting individual profile could have a huge financial impact and destabilise individual HEIs.

Based on the above experiences, two broad policy regimes are apparent:

1. *Create greater vertical (reputational) differentiation [neo-liberal model].*

Germany and Japan (along with China, Korea, and France) are using rankings as a free market mechanism driving the concentration of 'excellence' in a small number of research-intensive universities. As a policy driver, it favors 'prestige' factors such as rankings as a mechanism of institutional differentiation and stratification, and academic hierarchy (see Eckel, 2008, 188). Advocates of the market forces approach claim the policy of 'levelling down' (Gallagher, 2009) threaten research excellence.

2. *Create greater horizontal (mission) differentiation [social-democratic]:*

Australia wants to "brand Australia" with a horizontally "diverse set of high performing, globally-focused HEIs." A similar approach has been adopted by Norway. Rather than elevating a small number of elite institutions to world-class status, the aim is to build a world-class system providing excellence across diverse fields of learning and discovery, impacting economically and socially. In contrast to the market as the driver of excellence, this approach

favors recognizing and rewarding excellence wherever it occurs as a way to underpin social and regional equity.

The above policy delineations cannot take away from the fact that rankings have effectively become inculcated into the policymaking process and its language in all the above countries. Regardless of criticism of methodology or concern about its impact on other social and policy objectives, rankings have become a major driver and determinant of academic excellence:

[I]t isn't enough to just go around telling ourselves how good we are – we need to measure ourselves objectively against the world's best (Carr, 2009)

This fetishisation of world-class status, whether at an institutional or system level (Altbach, 2003; Salmi, 2009; Lisbon Council, 2008), is in direct response to the heightened battle for intellectual and talent dominance required for success in the global knowledge economy. Rankings highlight and reinforce reputation and act as a beacon for mobile academic talent, high-skilled labour and investment. The policy panic which has accompanied the current global economic and financial collapse has escalated this effect and exposed national insecurities, and brought concern for performance and value-for-money measurement to a new height. In turn, this has propelled countries heretofore agnostic about rankings, e.g. Ireland, to grab hold of rankings as a justification for sudden policy initiatives (Flynn, 2009). Rankings – or similar cross national comparisons – are likely to become further embedded into policy formation as governments, and higher education, battle to extend their presence in the knowledge marketplace.

Notes

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² Unattributed quotations are from participants from the 2006 or 2008 study. They were guaranteed anonymity given the sensitivity of the issues involved. No reference is given to country or institutional type except in a general way.

³ The figures for 2006 represent a slight change since 2005 when 19.3% of the student population was international students exceeding the OECD average of 6.7% (OECD, 2007). Retrieved 15 March 2009. <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Education/default.aspx>; see also http://www.rba.gov.au/PublicationsAndResearch/Bulletin/bu_jun08/aus_exports_education_services.html

⁴ 'Rankings of Australian Universities' Retrieved 29 March 2009. <http://www.australian-universities.com/rankings/>

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