

Higher Education Handbook

Pre-university pathways



University ranking tables can provide good support when comparing institutions. They are good starting points to narrow down the choice

Should the league tables form the only criteria when finalising university choices? Students often tend to select a university over another simply because it has a higher ranking.

Let us try to understand how rankings are compiled.

Ranking tables are compiled using a series of criteria; the two popular league tables, THE World University Rankings and QS World University Rankings, use different methodologies to collect data. The rankings rely on publications and citation data and academic reputation surveys, thus making the data subjective. Thus a specialised university might be highly reputed in its host country, but its unique niche strengths might not be well known in other countries and would thus not score highly.

Have you noticed that the placement of a university depends on the table used; the position can vary hugely.

Data that is self reported by the university can be easily manipulated. You should ask yourself - does the ranking truly reflect the quality of the education? Thus an institution that performs outstandingly in a subject but average in others will not top the league tables, but this course might in fact be perfect for you (for example it has state of the art facilities, or has excellent industry collaborations, or is accredited by a professional body).

You should be aware that THE Ranking and QS Ranking are commercial rankings, designed to make money. Use the ranking tables as a guide, but with caution, paying detailed attention to what the position of a university reflects. The tables can be misleading if not interpreted appropriately.

Understand the compilation of the rankings. A university could be highly placed because it has high entry requirement, although its employability (ie confidence from industry) and student satisfaction are low. There is a clear message here.

How much is the criteria used in compiling the rankings actually reflect the undergraduate student experience? Factors that can made a difference are campus amenities, industry standard equipment, quality of campus, accommodation, friendliness of lecturers, classroom size, career

development services, etc are some of the key criteria that are overlooked in the rankings.

Thus research widely:

- look at the modules and electives being offered
- examine placement opportunities and graduate outcomes,
- professional accreditation of the degree
etc

Student chat groups provide realistic picture of the students' experience, thus providing a different insight.

Reasons behind some students' choices:

"I chose University X because I liked the sound of the name"

"I chose University Y because it is very high up in the ranking tables, but I did not realise that the degree is not accredited by a professional body"

"I feel that my student experience was not the same as my friend who went to a slightly lower ranking university but had fantastic industrial attachment opportunities".

"I have always wanted to study at University Z. Although its entry requirement is very high and student feedback is very positive, it is not placed very high in the top 200 world universities. There was a lot of pressure from my family and teachers to choose another university but I am so glad I stayed with my first choice. The university places a huge emphasis on career progression and every course has a focus on developing skills needed by industry. I have done an industrial attachment and I might take advantage of post study work opportunities and gain some further experience before returning to Brunei."

These are comments from actual students. Do not be dictated by ranking tables.

How do rankings compare?

Complete University Guide (UK only)

Criteria include research excellence, student satisfaction. Also includes subject rankings

Emphasis on research - thus good 'new' universities miss out

Guardian University League Tables (UK only)

Focus on student satisfaction and progress

No measure of research excellence

Large changes in university standing year to year

QS World University Rankings

Methodology does not change year to year, thus universities do not 'jump' in their rankings

Heavy reliance on opinion surveys, thus too subjective

THE World University Rankings

Has highest numbers of indicators, thus wide range of data considered

Too much focus on opinion, thus subjective

Times/Sunday Times University Rankings (UK only)

Made of various indicators, well respected

Need subscription

Higher education will help you with your employability. With the new advances in technologies and changes in the job market as well as the skills that employers seek, do you want to conform to Oxbridge/Ivy League institution or do you want to attend a university that is 'best at something'.