

Rankings: What Do They Measure & Mean?

Each year, a number of organizations publish their annual ranking of world universities. Among the most popular rankings are the Times Higher Education (THE), Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and the University League Tables (rankings of universities in the UK) published by the Complete University Guide.

- ❑ [THE](#) is a weekly magazine affiliated with *The Times* newspaper, reporting on news specifically related to higher education. The publication's annual rankings are generated according to [13 performance indicators](#).
- ❑ [QS](#) is a UK-based company that provides services to students and higher education institutions. The QS rankings are generated by analysing performance according to [six metrics](#).
- ❑ US News and World Report and Forbes, are US-based and use different criteria.
- ❑ The Complete University Guide published [University League Tables](#) in print for over 10 years before moving exclusively online in 2007. You can find where they source the data and the methodology [here](#).

We should keep in mind that rankings should only be used in the beginning of the university research process in order to build a long list of interesting university matches. Rankings often have a focus on perceived reputation. This is to be determined through surveys, which can be highly subjective. Institutions' previous rankings also influence their 'new ranking' making it easier for 'top' universities to stay high up the list and difficult for upcoming universities to challenge their 'supremacy'.

Social media is a good place to supplement the use of rankings. Although universities' official Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube accounts will be crafted to give the best possible impression, reading the comments and feedback will give more realistic answers. Unofficial university sites and student-led chat groups can possibly provide a realistic picture of a student's experience at each university.

Selecting the right institution is no easy feat. It is good practice to gather information from a range of sources, make good use of the internet, visit the institutions if possible, and to not bear too much weight on how the institutions fare in annual rankings.