



GLOBAL

## HE ‘bastions of openness’ lead in latest U-Multirank

Nic Mitchell 04 June 2019

Universities with an ‘open border’ outlook to international ties and collaboration with colleagues abroad were some of the best performers in the 2019 edition of U-Multirank, published on 4 June, which sent out a strong message about the value of globally facing institutions to society.

Now in its sixth year, the **multi-dimensional rankings** founded with support from the European Commission demonstrated that ‘open border’ universities perform better than those with low international exchange in the areas of knowledge transfer, research impact and education.

They are more successful in engaging and transferring knowledge to industry, with ‘open border’ institutions having a 39% higher share of joint publications with industrial partners and establishing 80% more spin-off companies. Globally facing institutions are 2.5 times more likely to patent their ideas and their research has higher outreach, with their number of top cited publications being 36% higher than at locally facing universities.

“Additionally, students at open border universities are more satisfied with their overall learning experience,” said U-Multirank joint project leader, Frank Ziegele, who characterised ‘open border’ institutions as having higher rates of foreign students and academics, higher rates of international doctoral degrees and more international co-publications.

Ziegele told *University World News* the results were a “powerful antidote” to the inward-looking narrow nationalism being encouraged by some politicians in a number of countries and show the value of international co-operation in higher education and research, including encouraging more international student and staff exchanges and co-publications with academics in other countries.

### **Bastions of openness**

“Universities can feel like bastions of openness and in some countries they have found their international approach questioned, but our data shows the value to society of higher education and research institutions remaining open to the world and resisting pressure to turn inwards on themselves.

“The clear message to governments from U-Multirank 2019 is that restricting access to foreign scientists will have an impact and the worry is that reducing co-operation between staff could be a first step to be followed by cutting back on international students,” said Ziegele, citing the example of the United States reducing collaboration with Chinese academics.

U-Multirank 2019 highlighted particular strengths of some lesser well-known ‘open border’ universities, with LUISS Guido Carli in Rome being the top performer for co-publications with industrial partners and Montanuniversität Leoben in Austria taking the fourth spot in this field.

The United States led the indicator for top cited research publications, with the Rockefeller University in top spot followed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which gained the highest number of overall top scores among American universities in this year’s U-Multirank with 13 ‘A’ scores. Rockefeller had 12 ‘A’ scores overall and shared second place among American universities with Tufts University.

In the U-Multirank dimension for knowledge transfer, as measured by the number of spin-offs founded by universities, two French institutions were the top performing ‘open border’ universities: Télécom ParisTech and Grenoble Ecole de Management.

### **Country profiles expanded**

One of the features of the latest U-Multirank is the expansion of the number and depth of country higher education profiles. This year the performance of 24 national higher education systems was compared – up from 18 last year. Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine are among the new additions.

Frans van Vught, team co-leader of U-Multirank, told *University World News*: “The profiles could prove particularly useful for international students looking for data on studying in countries they may know little about.”

Ukrainian universities, for example, scored well for regional engagement and are said to be “very successful in having their students graduating on time”, according to U-Multirank data.

Universities in the United Kingdom performed very strongly in this year’s rankings, with 26 getting ‘A’ scores in 10 or more indicators. Newcastle and Cambridge universities were joint top British performers – with 16 ‘A’ scores each. UK universities scored highly for international orientation, with 151 institutions having a top ‘A’ score for international academic staff and 79 getting ‘A’s for international joint publications.

Dutch universities performed strongly for international orientation as well as regional engagement and research, with the University of Groningen leading the pack with 16 ‘A’ scores across the various indicators.

French institutions performed well across the various dimensions of U-Multirank, with 19 achieving more than 10 ‘A’ scores. The top performer was EDHEC Business School with 20 top scores followed by Télécom ParisTech and AgroParisTech, with 16 ‘A’ scores each.

Some countries, including Germany, were let down in the teaching and learning dimension by non-completion rates and students taking longer to graduate, but German institutions put in a strong performance for research, knowledge transfer and international orientation – with Jacobs University and WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management both gaining 14 top ‘A’ scores.

Swiss universities were strongest for co-publications with industrial partners and their high volume of external research income. Eight Swiss universities had 10 or more ‘A’ scores, with the highest number (18) achieved by ETH Zurich.

### **Strong on regional engagement**

Swedish universities were strongest for research and regional engagement, with Chalmers University of Technology being the best performer with 17 ‘A’ scores across the indicators.

The top performing Danish institution was the Technical University of Denmark with 14 ‘A’ scores. Ghent University achieved the highest score in Belgium, also with 14 ‘A’ scores.

Spanish universities were among the best for regional engagement and student mobility – with Pompeu Fabra University gaining 14 ‘A’ scores overall.

Bocconi University had the highest number of ‘A’ scores in Italy (15), with Italian universities achieving their best results in the research dimension.

Ireland’s top performers had strikingly different strengths, with the Institute of Technology Tallaght gaining 12 of its 15 top ‘A’ positions for regional engagement, international orientation and knowledge transfer, while University College Cork got half its 14 ‘A’ grades for research.

“This highlights the diversity within national higher education systems and why U-Multirank encourages people to take a close look at the different academic profiles of higher education institutions,” said Van Vught.

Central European University was the top scoring Hungarian university with 13 ‘A’ grades, with its best performance for international orientation and research in contrast to the next highest performers, Eötvös Loránd University and Budapest University of Technology and Economics. They both got 7 ‘A’ scores, mainly for regional engagement.

### **More than 1,700 universities examined**

U-Multirank is an alternative approach to comparing universities, and claims to offer “a

solution to the flaws of traditional league tables”. Its multi-dimensional approach compares the performance of 1,711 universities across a range of different activities, grading each of them from ‘A’ (very good) to ‘E’ (weak). This allows users to identify a university’s strengths and weaknesses, on the aspects that most interest them.

“We’ve looked at 1,711 universities from 96 countries across the world this year and expanded to 24 subject areas, as well as getting feedback from more than 100,000 current students at participating universities for our student voice indicators in the teaching and learning dimension. For the **country profiles**, we’ve only looked at countries where we have high coverage,” said Van Vught.

Among expansion plans, Van Vught told *University World News* that U-Multirank hopes to assist countries across the globe to establish reliable data capture systems so that they can fully participate in U-Multirank as it grows its world coverage.

“We have already talked to authorities in Kenya and several other countries showed interest to create something like U-Multirank on a national level. National rankings based on our methodology have already been established in Germany and Spain.”

\* U-Multirank has been developed by an independent consortium for the European Commission which hoped its multi-dimensional approach would challenge the traditional higher education league tables based largely on research performance. The consortium is led by the Centre for Higher Education in Germany; the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, the Centre for Science and Technology Studies from Leiden University and the Fundación CYD in Spain. It is funded by the European Commission, the Bertelsmann Foundation and Banco Santander.

*Nic Mitchell is a British-based freelance journalist and PR consultant who runs De la Cour Communications and blogs about higher education for the European Universities Public Relations and Information Officers’ Association, EUPRIO, and on his **website**. He also provides English-language communication support for Norwegian, Czech and UK universities and specialist higher education media.*

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190603154439410>