

Getting Specific: Excellence Identified in 29 Disciplines

Description

The [QS World University Rankings by Subject](#) are designed to provide targeted information to university applicants, academics, and anyone else who needs to know where there is excellence in a specific discipline.

One unique feature of these rankings is that it is possible for universities which would never be prominent in the overall World University Rankings to do well here. Partly this is because they feature specialist institutions, including postgraduate institutions, which do not appear in the World University Rankings (WUR). But more importantly, the World Rankings are inevitably dominated by large, general universities, alongside an elite of science and technology institutions with highly visible and well-cited research. When we look at specific subjects, there is more scope for surprises.

A good example involves the various colleges of the University of London. Because of its specialist status, the London School of Economics appeared in 64th position in the 2011 WUR. But here, we see it at number three for politics, four for sociology, five for economics and for accounting and finance, nine for law, and 12 for history. Likewise, the Institute of Education appears in 17th place in our education ranking. It did not appear in the main WUR, although we ranked it 209 in the world for the social sciences and 313 for the arts and humanities.

The Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi, in Milan, is another specialist institution whose qualities are recognized in the subject rankings. Since it offers only business, law, and economics, this private university does not feature in the WUR. However, it is in the top 20 for both economics, and accounting and finance, showing substantial improvement in both areas in the latest rankings. Professor Fulvio Ortu, Bocconi's Dean of International Affairs, said at the launch of the rankings in Prague: "Of course, our ranking is not the only thing that we look at. We do not want to be influenced by a specific placing in a particular year, but we do take account of our long-term pattern in rankings."

While we have not carried out an analysis of business education here, our look at accounting and finance also shows the London Business School in third place and HEC in Paris at 17. The LBS also appears in 21st spot for economics.

There are fewer surprise entrants in the sciences, medicine, and technology than in the arts and humanities. The reason is partly the sheer cost of excellence in these subjects. This means that they tend to be concentrated in major institutions, whether general universities or very large specialist ones such as MIT or Imperial College London. However, some of these rankings also show continental European specialists in a better light than they appear in the WUR. In physics, for example, we see EPFL and ETH, the French and German-speaking Swiss federal universities, in ninth and tenth places. They are also well-placed in other science and engineering subjects from chemistry to electrical engineering, where ETH is sixth in the world.

In addition, it is hard to be good at medicine without access to a major hospital system, and these tend to be attached to a big university. The top university in our medicine ranking that is not also in the WUR

is the very distinguished Mayo Medical School in the US, in 16th position. We also place the Karolinska Institute in Sweden at 20th here.

But even with criteria that allow a broad range of institutions to appear, the brand-name universities of the English-speaking world still dominate the top of our 29 subject rankings tables. Cambridge, Harvard, and their ilk are well-placed in all the disciplines we cover, which account for the vast majority of university life in terms of student numbers and research activity.