

HEW Newsletter – Rankings Results 2015/16: An Overview

Description

Despite the improved methodology described elsewhere in this issue of Higher Education World, the 2015/16 QS World University Ranking agree with last year's on one thing: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is the world's top university. It has near-perfect scores on five of our six measures, and comes 62nd in the world on the other, its percentage of international students.

The stability of these rankings is also evident from the fact that the same institutions fill the top eight places in the Ranking as last year, although MIT is the only one in the same position. The most spectacular move affects Imperial College, London. It is down from second to eighth place, largely because of a 59-place fall in its citation per faculty member count. This is likely to be due mainly to the reduced emphasis that we now place upon excellence in biomedicine.

Staying in London, the opposite effect is visible in the 36-place rise for the London School of Economics (now 35th). The LSE's lack of significant science and technology emphasis has long meant that its world standing was not fully reflected in our rankings. This is exactly the kind of anomaly that this our changed methodology has now addressed.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the upper levels of our rankings is the prominent position of Asia's two top universities, both in Singapore. A 10-place jump to twelfth by the National University of Singapore is remarkable enough, but even this achievement is modest by comparison with the 26 places gained by Nanyang Technological University, now in 13th place.

NTU was founded in 1991 and even its predecessor institute only dates back to 1981. It has been quickly rising through the Rankings for some years. While our changed citations methodology has done NTU some good this year, NTU has also improved its faculty/student ratio and its standing in our academic survey. These two measures account for 60 per cent of a university's possible score in the Ranking. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, which has a somewhat similar institutional mission to NTU, is also upwardly mobile this year, up 12 places to 28th.

One consistent result of these rankings is that Switzerland has continental Europe's top universities. ETH Zurich and EPFL Lausanne are ninth and 14th here, both up three places. These, along with two French universities, are the only continental European institutions in the top 50.

In the lower reaches of the rankings, there is some good news for Indian higher education, which typically performs modestly. We have admitted the Indian Institute of Science to the Rankings after reconsidering its academic profile, and it has entered as India's top institution in 147th place. There are also worthwhile gains for various branches of the Indian Institute of Technology such as Delhi, up 56 places to 179th.

by Martin Ince