



Subject Improvement To Drive Chinese Mergers

Description

Martin Ince, chair of the advisory board for the [QS University Rankings](#), spoke during October at the Chinese Academy of Science's Fourth International Workshop on Innovation and Performance Management in Beijing, the only representative of any global ranking organisation to do so. Here he reports on the reaction.

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There was widespread interest at IWPM in QS's World University Rankings by Subject, published earlier this year for the second time. They were a major focus of questioning at the IWPM and at a seminar I gave at Tsinghua University, 48 in the QS Rankings and China's second-ranked institution behind its neighbour, Peking University.

At Tsinghua, I was asked specifically about the makeup of the subject rankings. All 29 of the subject rankings use some combination of academic opinion, employer opinion and citations, but the percentage weighting for each measure depends upon the subject's specific pattern of employment and publishing.

One speaker at the IWPM said that the subject rankings are evidence of the poor overall performance of Chinese institutions by world standards. She suggested that they might provide a further incentive for China's Ministry of Education to merge universities, in a bid to create bigger and better centres for specific subjects.

These reforms might even affect the Academy of Sciences itself. This massive organisation includes about 100 research institutes as well as three full universities.

However, it will not be simple to reform Chinese universities by means of mergers. China has many specialist universities, covering every topic from aerospace to forestry. There is even an agricultural university in central Beijing. Many of these institutions date from the 1950s, when Chinese higher education was restructured on the basis of advice from the Soviet Union. They are deeply embedded in Chinese professional life, even though they attract little international attention and in some cases are not operating at global standards.

? Another speaker at the conference, Xiangdong Chen of Beihang University, gave a detailed analysis of Chinese patterns in industrial and academic patenting. It confirms our view at QS that patents are useless as a measure of university quality. The majority of patents taken out by universities are never adopted by industry or other end users. More importantly, university patents have the shortest half-life of any type of patent. Many of them are allowed to lapse within two years of being filed.