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# Controlling the new managerialism and the high education

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This paper analyses the role of rankings as an instrument of new managerialism. It shows how rankings are reconstituting the purpose of universities, the role of academics and the definition of what it is to be a student. The paper opens by examining the forces that have facilitated the emergence of the ranking industry and the ideologies underpinning the so-called ‘global’ university rankings. It demonstrates how rankings are a part of politically inspired, performativity-led mode of governance, designed to ensure that universities are aligned with market values through systems of intensive auditing. It interrogates how the seemingly objective character of rankings, in particular the use of numbers, creates a facade of certainty that make them relatively unassailable: numerical ordering gives the impression that what is of value in education can be measured numerically, hierarchically ordered and incontrovertibly judged. The simplicity and accessibility of numerical rankings deflects attention from their arbitrariness and their political and moral objectives.

**Keywords:** audit; culture; ideological tool; markets; measurement; neoliberalism; new managerialism; numbers, performativity; public interests; ranking

## Higher education as a marketable service

Over the past 20 years, there has been a global movement to alter the role of the university (Angus, 2004; Bullen, Robb, & Kenway, 2004; Hazelkorn, 2011; Robertson, Bonal, & Dale, 2002) and, in particular, to reduce the amount of public investment in higher education generally. There is a growing expectation that universities should be self-financing through external collaborations with business, in particular (Europa, 2011, p. 1).<sup>1</sup> In the United Kingdom (UK), private higher education providers are regarded by government as a mechanism for reducing the cost of higher education to the exchequer (Ball, 2012, p. 21), and university education is increasingly defined as a market commodity (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Universities have been transformed into powerful consumer-oriented corporate networks, where public-interest values are seriously challenged (Ball, 2012; Rutherford, 2005). The factors that have contributed to corporatisation and commercialisation are notable, not only in and of themselves, but also because of how they have reframed the orientation and purposes of higher education.

Multilateral agencies including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, and political institutions such as the European Union (EU), exercise increasing influence over national education policies (Dale, 2005; Lingard & Rawolle, 2011; Sellar & Lingard, 2013). Control and regulation

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is often indirect, as in the form of

that there are now several hundred for-profit colleges and Universities across the world, are indications that for-profit trading in higher education is also well established (Hill, 2005). Private higher education is worth an estimated \$400 billion globally and about one quarter of all higher education students are in private colleges (Ball, 2012, p. 20). The sale of services, including the sale of education, has gradually began to make up the employment deficit of manufacturing (D'Agostino, Serafini, & Ward-Warmedinger, 2006), and both the EU and the US have seen a rise in a range of tradable services in recent decades.<sup>5</sup>

Faced with declining returns from trade in industry and agriculture, nation States began to explore what services they could sell. Services that were defined as rights under one code of ethics (notably health and education) mutated to being marketable commodities under another (Tomasevski, 2005). Higher education was increasingly defined as a potential source of revenue, and as a private rather than a public good, thereby justifying its commercialisation (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Tooley, 2000).

At an ideological level, the hegemony of liberal democracy and free market capitalism that ensued from the demise of communism, brought with it widespread allegiance to the liberalisation of trade and services (Fukuyama, 1992). Neoliberalism, which has been nascent but not global under the influence of Hayek<sup>6</sup> and Friedman, was given a new lease of life, a life that was deliberately planned and orchestrated at a political level from the 1970s onwards, especially in the US (Harvey, 2005, pp. 39–63). With its explicit anti-redistributive goals and its legitimisation of same through the powerful ideologies of possessive individualism and choice, neoliberalism paved the way for reducing state expenditures on public services. The ideology of the 'small state' was popularised and the pillorying of public services on the grounds of 'efficiency' was pervasive.<sup>7</sup> What followed was a declining commitment to invest in all types of public services, including housing, health and transport. The discourse around education changed from one focused on rights and needs to one focused on markets and choices. The reluctance to invest in higher education was merely part of a wider project of privatising public services.<sup>8</sup> As higher education was defined as a net contributor rather than cost to the exchequer, the marketisation for higher education through trading on identities, brands and rankings was inevitable.

The response to the marketising of higher education has been immediate and dramatic. Australia increased its overall share of the world's population of cross-border students

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## U i e i d a i c f a c i l i a i g a k e i a i o

The regulation of universities through rankings was also enabled by the internal dynamics of universities themselves. Although universities are public interest bodies, they have not always honoured their public interest commitments (Harkavy, 2006). Research on social class inequality in education has shown that not only has higher education done little to challenge class inequality in education over many decades (Archer et al., 2002; Clancy, 1995, 2001; Gamoran, 2001; Rumberger, 2010; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010



Focusing on measurable outputs has the ultimate impact of defining human relationships in the university in transactional terms, as the means to an end – the end being high performance and productivity that can be coded and marketed. This reduces first order social and moral values to second-order principles; trust, integrity, care and solidarity are subordinated to regulation, control and competition. When managerialist practices achieve hegemonic control, they parasitise and weaken those very values on which the university organisation depends. While few would question the value of efficiency, in terms of maximising the use of available resources, the difficulty with managerialism is that it does not just prioritise efficiency, it suppresses other organisational values so that they become incidental. The net effect of the devaluation of moral purposes is that public services, such as education, are no longer defined as capacity-building public goods.

The first order effect of performativity is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measureable performance outcomes and are a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, emotional and moral development that have no immediate measureable performance value



CHE Centrums based on multiple criteria. China, Spain, Macedonia and a range of other countries also have their own ranking system (Huang, 2012; Rauhvargers, 2013).<sup>12</sup>

Both the THE and QS rankings give a heavy weighting (40% in QS and 34.5% in THE in 2012)<sup>13</sup> to what is called reputational ranking based on online surveys to academics.<sup>14</sup> There are a range of problems with such ‘surveys’ as they are not based on stratified random samples of academics from across the world or across disciplines, and there is an inherent bias towards English-speaking countries in both the THE and QS surveys (Huang, 2012; Kaba, 2012; Rauhvargers, 2013).

The ARWU does not use reputational surveys to assess rank, nor does it include the humanities and most social sciences in ranking universities.<sup>15</sup> Although some ranking schemes do include humanities and social sciences, ‘the arts and humanities, and to a

adversely affects rankings. Unfortunately, there is evidence that this does not happen. Higher education has been the preserve of the elite in many countries and this trend is persistent over time (Duru-Bellat, Kieffer, & Reimer, 2008; McCowan, 2012; Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). Rankings are likely to exacerbate inequality of access to higher education even further (Hazelkorn, 2011).

A further issue with ranking is that the determination of being ‘world class’ is based on criteria set by the existing academic elite: being able to acquire or retain academics with Nobel prizes or Field Medals, or to determine what constitutes elite journals, or to exclude disadvantaged students, and/or operate low staff–student ratios, are measures of worth that are only available to those that have an accumulated history of privilege, power and money. Meeting the budget target to be world class is estimated to be 1.5 to 2 billion US dollars per year (or €1.3 to 1.7 billion Euro), funding that is far beyond the national higher education budgets of many nation states (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 197).

Endowments also play a crucial role in determining ranking, effectively making it impossible for excellent universities without significant endowments to compete for a high rank. Data from US universities shows that the larger the amount of an institution’s endowment, the more likely it is to be ranked in the top 200 universities in the world (Kaba, 2012, pp. 26–29): Harvard’s endowment in 2007 was US\$34.6 billion, Yale’s was US\$22.6 billion while Stanford’s was US\$17.1 billion (Kaba, 2012). As the cumulative endowments of these elite universities (over US\$74 billion) are in excess of the entire tax income of many small nation states, it is evident how elite universities can retain their ranking year-on-year while those ‘below the bar’ enter a cycle of disadvantage (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 93). The endowments allow elite universities to offer highly competitive salaries to attract highly-cited faculty members from within the global academic market, and it enables them to give attractive scholarships to young graduates thereby buying up the ‘talent’ of early stage researchers globally (Marginson & Van Der Wende, 2007).

As the ranking of universities is aligned with the ranking of individual academics, a new form of individualised academic capitalism is working out within higher education (Slaughter & Leslie, 2001). While individualised competition is not new in higher education, the practice of ranking individuals exacerbates competitiveness and contributes to undermining collegiality (Ball, 2012; Lynch, 2010a). Both individual and institutional ranking exacerbate the stratification of universities; this works to the detriment of the autonomy of universities in defining their own mission and purposes (Deem et al., 2008).

Ranking also intensifies competition between universities within and between nation states through branding and networking: the Ivy league in the US, the Oxbridge and the Russell groups in the UK, the Sandstones in Australia, and international alliances such as Universitas 21, have been developed to promote an elite identity that will help competitive advantage in the higher education market (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Rankings are a type of ‘consumer product ratings system’, a contest in which those not listed, or listed very lowly, are not in an position to establish themselves as premier institutions in any meaningful sense. When reputation is heavily weighted towards prestige, power and money, much of which is historically established, newer players cannot enter the race, or if they do, they enter and compete on terms that are not of their making and on which they cannot succeed.

### Ra ki g a d h e ‘ a f o a l e ’

Despite claims to the contrary, university rankings were never about meeting ‘consumer’ (student) needs for information in making choices in the internal education markets of

higher education within nation states. Most students are allocated to universities on the basis of prior academic performance, and those who have a choice, either must have a very high

Report Rankings on the US Law schools shows, for example, that both the status of Law schools and student choices is strongly determined by their annual ranking in USN. The rank frames the schools and the school (re)defines itself in terms of the rank (Espeland & Sauder, 2007).

Rankings are, in theory, an apolitical act, yet they are profoundly political. Once enumerated, quality and value can only be challenged by new ‘numbers’ and those activities and people that cannot be enumerated cannot be included in the appraisal of quality and value (Espeland & Sauder, 2007). Whether intended or not, rankings denigrate by exclusion those activities that cannot be counted in the ordering of things.

Numbers are central to legitimating rankings and for deploying them as a mode of governance. It is numbers that facilitate the generalised acceptance of the validity of ranking and widespread political disengagement from their internal dynamics. The power of numbers rests in their unassailability to the mathematically uninitiated: truth in numbers has a higher status, and is seen as less contestable than truth expressed in narrative form. The fear that people have of mathematics (Boaler, 2008) feeds into feelings about numbers and this, in turn, feeds into the ranking industry. Fear of being ‘wrong’ in interpreting statistical data on rankings silences dissent from the general public, especially the media, not least because so many media personnel tend to be drawn from the non-mathematical fields, especially the humanities. They frequently lack the skills to examine the hidden assumptions of data and numbers hidden within the ranking systems.<sup>22</sup>

On the surface, the simplicity of numerical ordering appears to remove any sense of arbitrariness from the process of university rankings. It creates an impression that what is of merit can be hierarchically ordered and incontrovertibly judged. Numbers have an aura of mystery and power and are assumed to be without ideological bias. Yet, numbers are derived from a standpoint, a political and intellectual position and are open to interpretation and distortion (Borer & Lawn, 2013). Moreover, what gives numbers global currency in ranking people and institutions is what makes them inappropriate as measures of appraisal. They bypass ‘deep issues’ and allow ‘dissimilar desires, needs, and expectations’ to be ‘made commensurable’ (Lingard, 2011, pp. 363–364 citing Porter (1995))

### **I, ac of a ki g ° he c l, e of he i e i**

There is a relatively silent colonisation of the hearts and minds of academics and students happening in universities, albeit coded in the language of accountability, progress and efficiency (Giroux, 2002). Constant appraisal leads to the internalisation of an actuarial and calculative mind set both at the individual and collective levels; relations become transactional and product led. The blandness and simplicity of rankings deflects attention from the ways in which they are changing academics and students, from the inside out (Ball, 2012).

As rankings form public perceptions of universities, senior administrators have to manage their ranking whether they wish to or not (Farrell & Van Der Werf, 2007). Thus, a range of ‘gaming strategies

in a competitive system. Parents can and do use private resources to advantage their own children in economically unequal societies (Marsh, 2011); merit scholarships merely reinforce privilege.

Ranking, auditing and measuring is also a recipe for self-display and the fabrication of image over substance among staff (Ball, 2003). The heavy focus on citations as a measure of individual academic worth encourages 'gaming' or the manipulating of citation indices at the personal level (Todd & Ladle, 2008). Ranking also endorses a type of Orwellian surveillance of one's everyday work that is paralleled with a reflexive surveillance of the self. One is always measuring oneself up or down, yet there is a deep alienation in constantly living the threat of the damage that a poor performance entails (Leathwood, 2005).

As trust in professional integrity and peer regulation is replaced by performance indicators, the quality of peer relations is also diminished. Relating through audits and appraisals enhances hierarchies and diminishes goodwill and collegiality. Feelings of

money to compromise on ethical standards, and to defer to industry requests to control access to, or even manipulate clinical trial data and results (Washburn, [2005](#)).

Because managerial principles originated in a commercial context where process is subordinated to output and profit, managerialist values manifest themselves in education through the promotion of forms of governance (i.e. measurement, surveillance, control, regulation) that are often antithetical to the caring that is at the heart of good education. While the nurturing of student learning has an outcome dimension, gains are generally not measurable in a narrowly specifiable time frame. The gains and losses from having/not having care and nurture in education are only seen

disincentive to be either a caring teacher or public intellectual, not only privatises knowledge to closed groups, it also forecloses the opportunity to have hypotheses tested or challenged from experiential (disinterested) standpoints outside the academy (Lynch, Crean, & Moran, [2010](#)). It limits the opportunities for learning that occurs when there is a dialogue between experiential and theoretical knowledge.

Rather than being tyrannised by numbers and overwhelmed by the rhetoric of ranking and labelling, academics need to build a counter-hegemonic discourse to managerialism and neoliberalism in higher education, a discourse that is grounded in the principles of democracy and equal participation that are at the heart of the public education tradition.

11. Rauhvargers' (2013) report contains the most comprehensive available review of the criteria used in ranking. It is accessible at [http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications\\_homepage\\_list/EUA\\_Global\\_University\\_Rankings\\_and\\_Their\\_Impact\\_-\\_Report\\_II.sflb.ashx](http://www.eua.be/Libraries/Publications_homepage_list/EUA_Global_University_Rankings_and_Their_Impact_-_Report_II.sflb.ashx)
12. Hazelkorn (2011) also has an extensive comparative review.
13. As the weighting given to different criteria is changing regularly among the ranking agencies (Rauhvargers, 2013), these figures only apply to 2012.
14. QS ranking criteria and weighting: <http://www.iu.qs.com/university-rankings/rankings-indicators/> (accessed 28 April 2013). Times Higher Ranking: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/413382.article> (Times Higher Education Supplement, 7 September 2010 scheme; accessed 28 April 2013).
15. ARWU – Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking: [http://www.universityrankings.ch/methodology/shanghai\\_jiao\\_tong](http://www.universityrankings.ch/methodology/shanghai_jiao_tong) (accessed: 28 April 2013).
16. The German CHE system does include student evaluations but this is a within-state evaluation system and does not claim to be global. CHE (Centrums für Hochschulentwicklung): <http://www.che-ranking.de/cms/?getObject=644&getLang=> (accessed 28 April 2013).
17. John Henry Newman was the founder of University College Dublin in the mid-nineteenth century. His published lectures on The Idea of a University had considerable influence in defining the role of the university in society.
18. Higher education is part of the general right to education under the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of 1989 and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) (McCowan, 2012 pp. 113–114).
19. But not the US.
20. The concept of the knowledge economy implies that the generation and the exploitation of knowledge per se is central to the creation of wealth. 'A number of separate discourses from economics, management theory, futurology and sociology can be identified as having contributed to shaping the present policy narrative of the knowledge economy' are examined by Peters (2001, p. 4) all of which centre on the idea that knowledge and technical skills (advanced human capital) will be the drivers of economic advantage globally. Unfo4r6T,



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