

# Quality and excellence: How useful are these concepts in institutional strategies?

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*Academic Excellence: Between Holy Grail and Measurable Objectives*  
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# European University Association (EUA)

- 783 universities and 34 national rectors' conferences
- Conducts projects and studies to understand the impact of European and international developments on universities: e.g., RISP, DEFINE and Trends
- Contributes to European policy discussions and developments

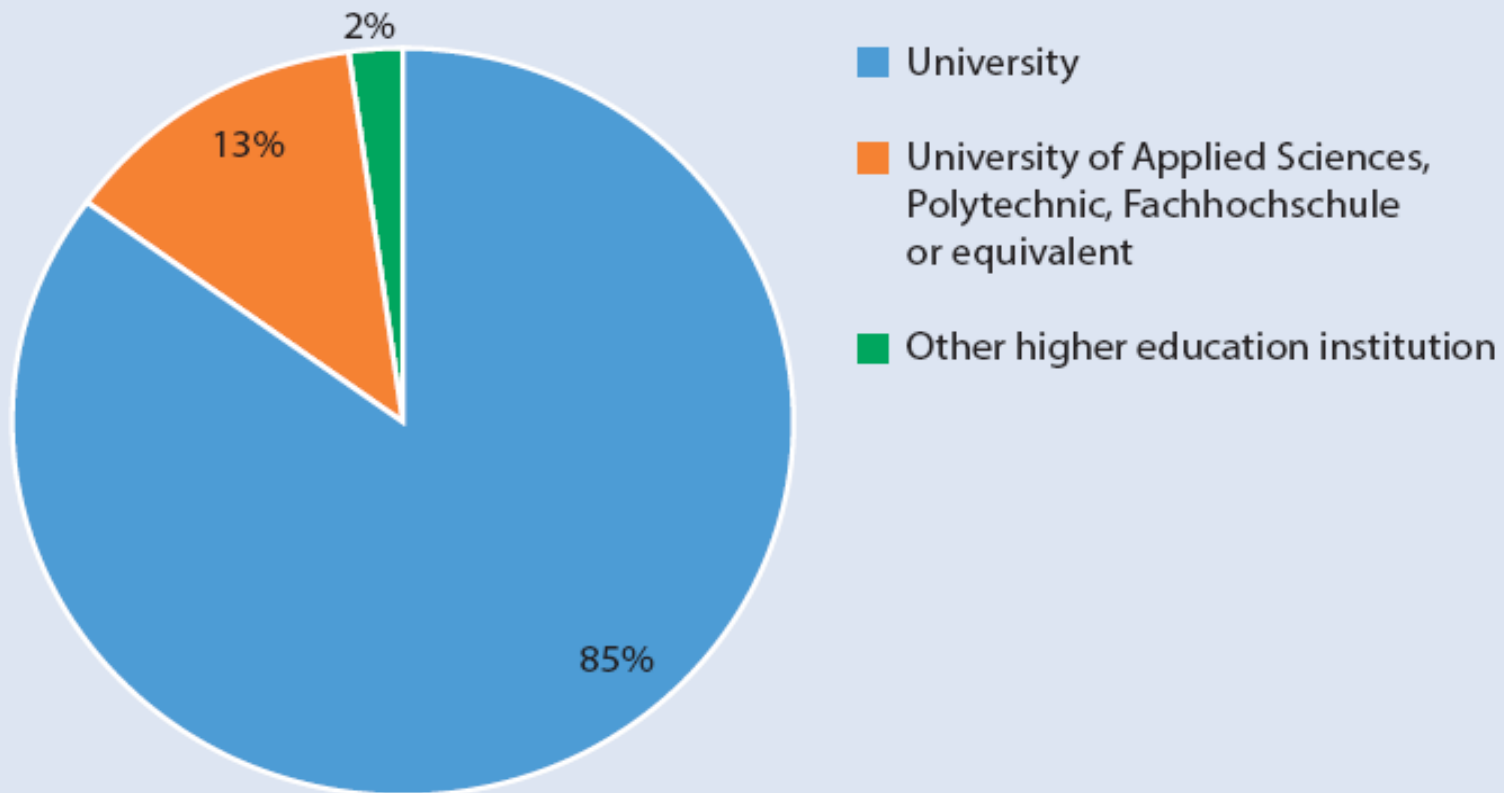
# Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes (RISP)

- Follow-up to two EUA reports on ranking methodologies (Rauhvargers 2011 & 2013)
- Key objectives:
  - Understand the impact and influence of rankings on European higher education institutions, specifically on institutional strategic decision-making
  - Identify how HEIs use rankings and similar schemes as strategic tools or to promote institutional development
  - Provide guidance on how to use rankings constructively

# RISP Methodology

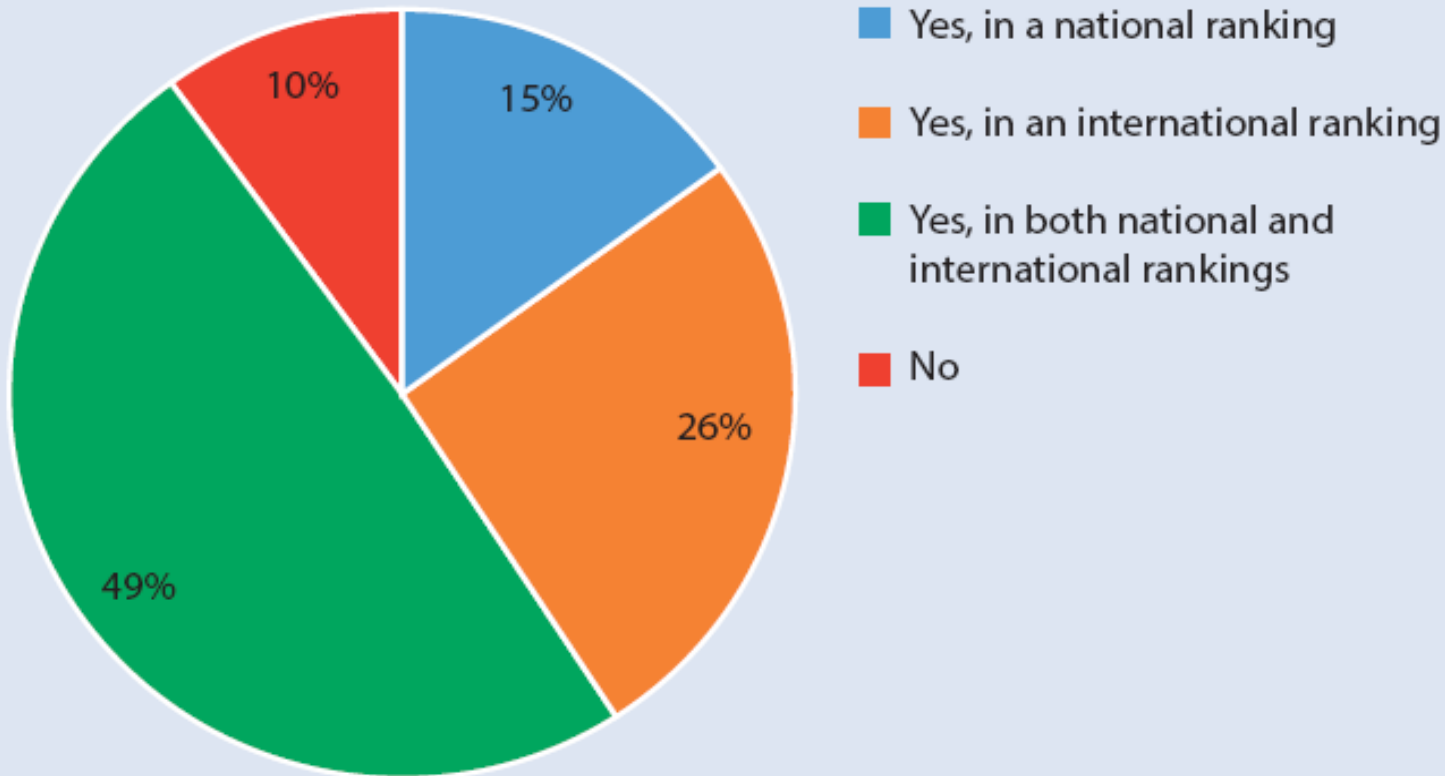
- Online survey among European higher education institutions: 171 respondents from 39 countries
- Site visits to 6 countries (Austria, France, Denmark, Portugal, Romania, United Kingdom)
- A roundtable with senior university managers and stakeholders

# Respondents' profile: Institutional type



N = 171

# Respondents' profile: Ranked?

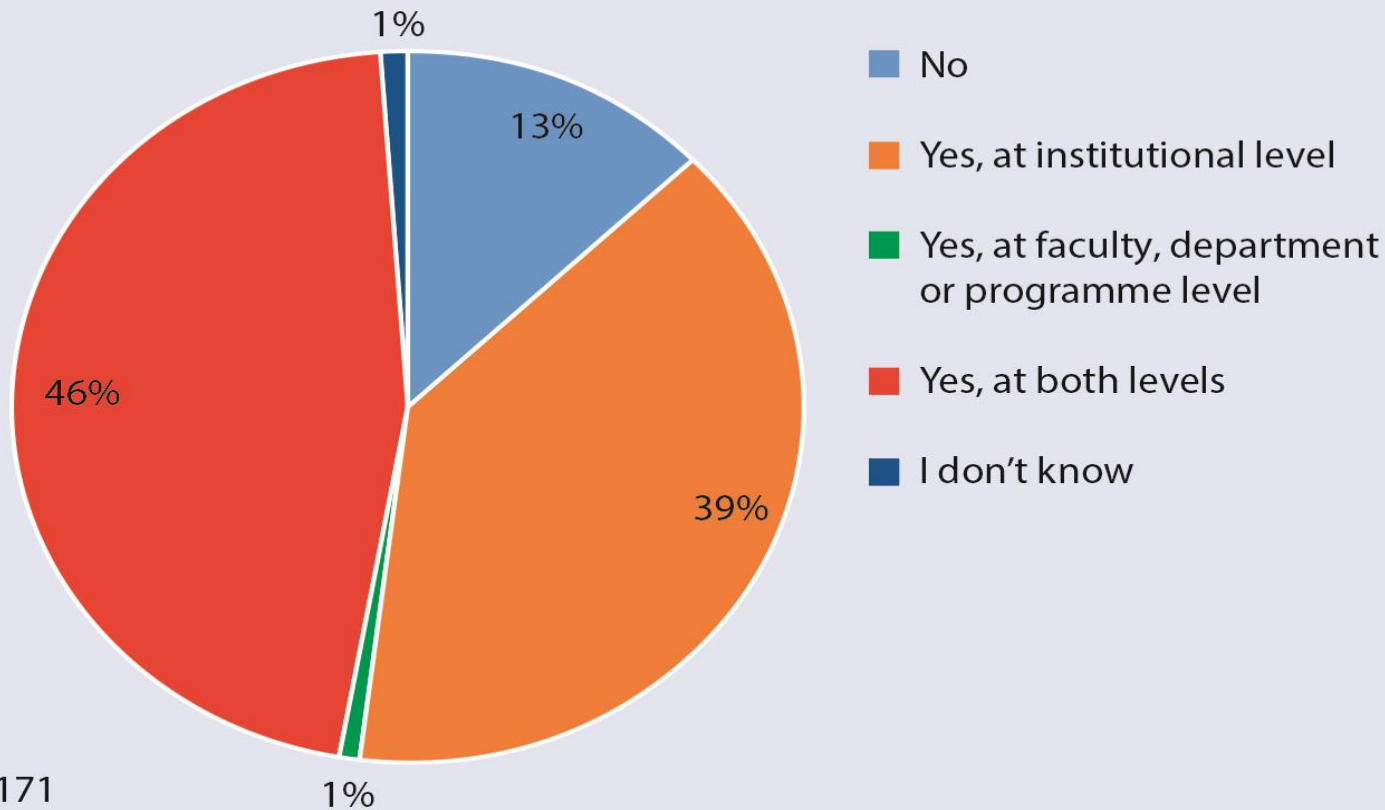


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# Summary of key findings

- While highly critical of rankings, HEIs still use rankings:
  - Fill information gap
  - Benchmark
  - Inform institutional decision-making
  - Develop marketing material
- Institutional processes affected by rankings fall into 4 categories:
  - Mechanisms to monitor rankings
  - Clarification of institutional profile and adapting core activities
  - Improvement to institutional data collection
  - Investment in enhancing institutional image

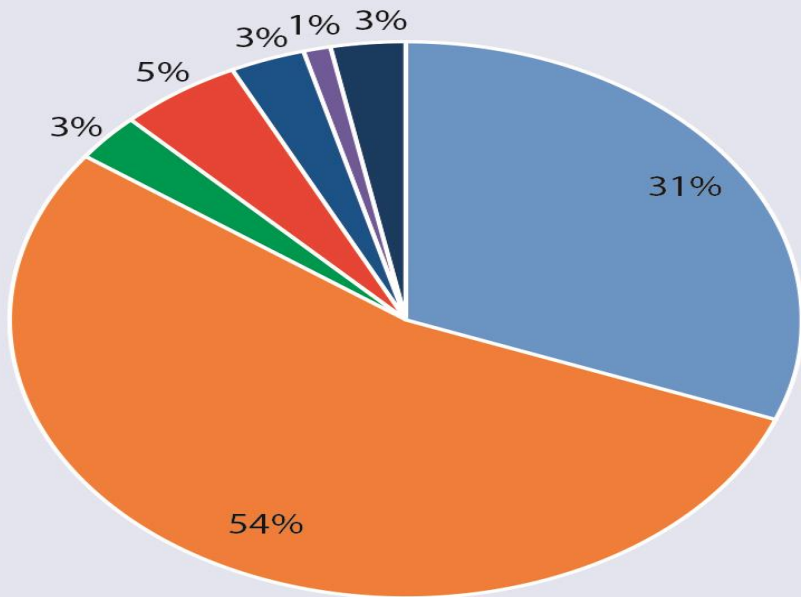
# Does your institution monitor its position in rankings?



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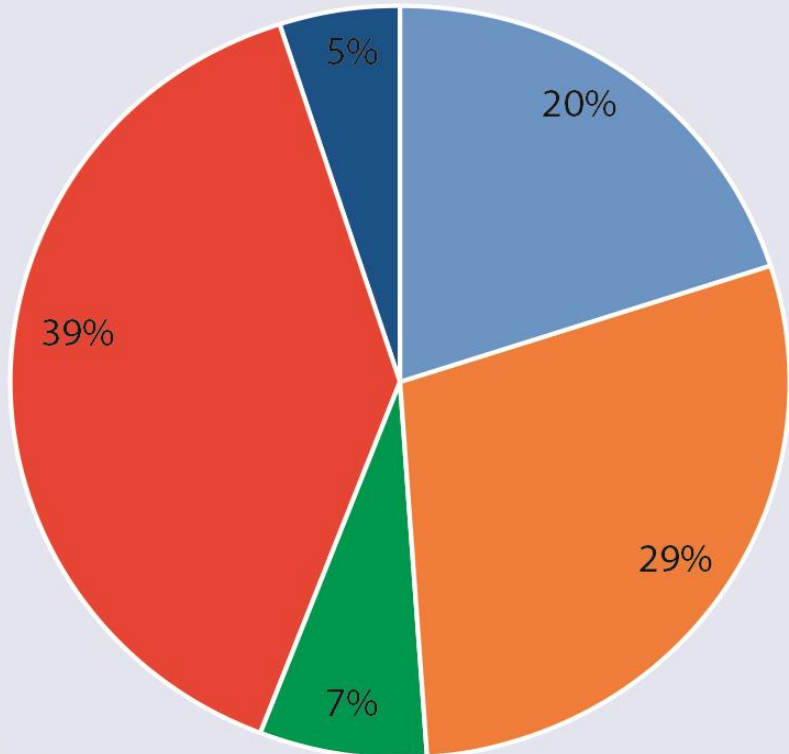


# Monitoring rankings



- A board, senate or equivalent governing body at the level of the institution
- The rector, president, vice-chancellor or equivalent
- The head of administration or equivalent highest administrative position
- Committees or working groups at institutional level
- The dean or equivalent leader at faculty, department, programme, centre or institute level
- Committees or working groups at faculty, department, programme, centre or institute level
- Other

# Monitoring ranking of other/peer institutions



- No
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions in our country
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions abroad
- Yes, we monitor the ranking of other/peer institutions, both in our country and abroad
- We are planning to do it

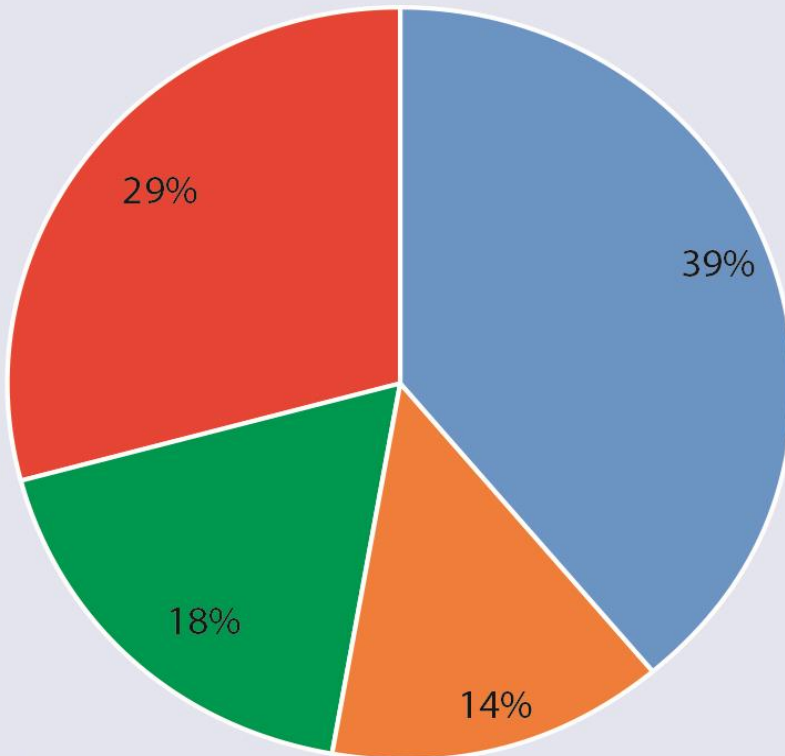
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# Reasons for monitoring other institutions

Reason for monitoring other institutions	
Benchmark purposes (compare yourself to other institutions) at national level	84%
Benchmark purposes at international level	75%
Establishing/maintaining national collaborations	23%
Establishing/maintaining international collaborations	56%
Establishing/maintaining staff exchange	28%
Establishing/maintaining student exchange	37%
Other	2%

N = 137. The results do not add up to 100% as respondents to this question could indicate multiple replies.

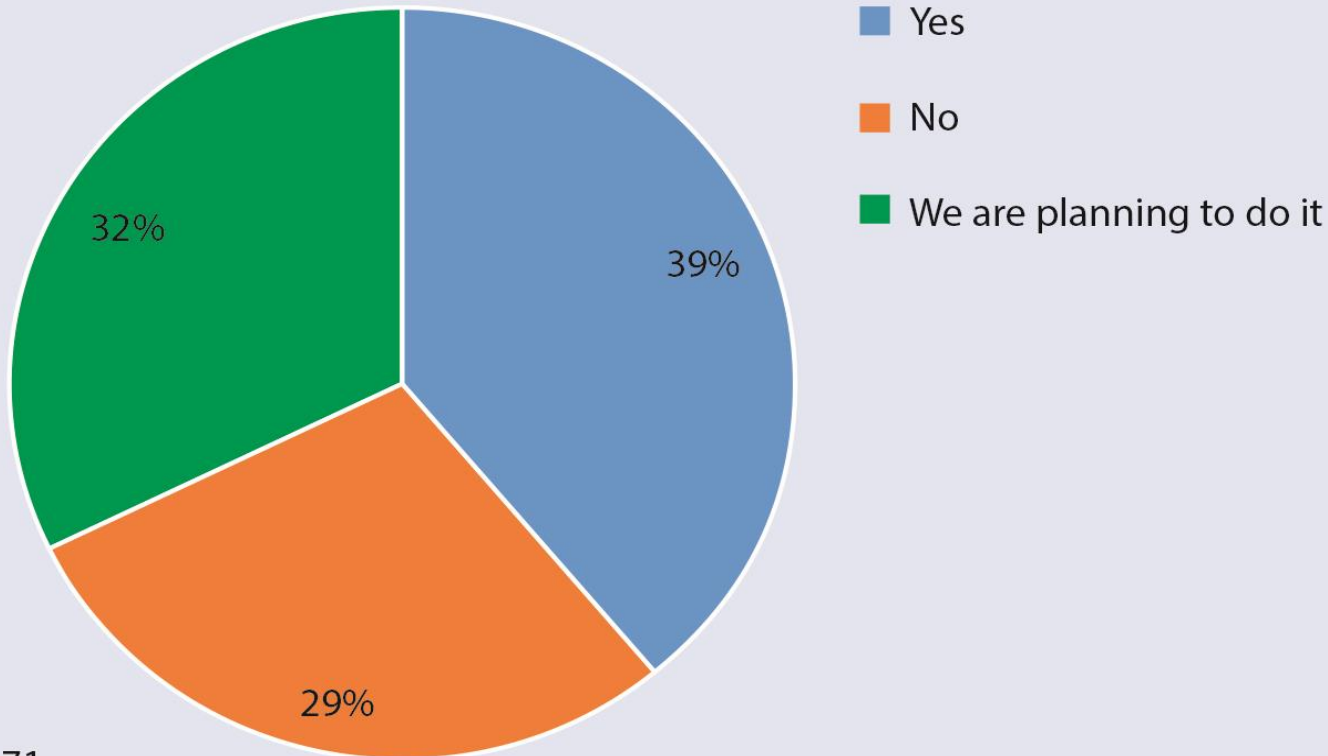
# Rankings' role in institutional strategy



- No
- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in national rankings.
- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target in terms of its position in international rankings.
- Yes, and our institution formulated a clear target for both national and international rankings.

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# Rankings for strategic, organisational, managerial or academic action

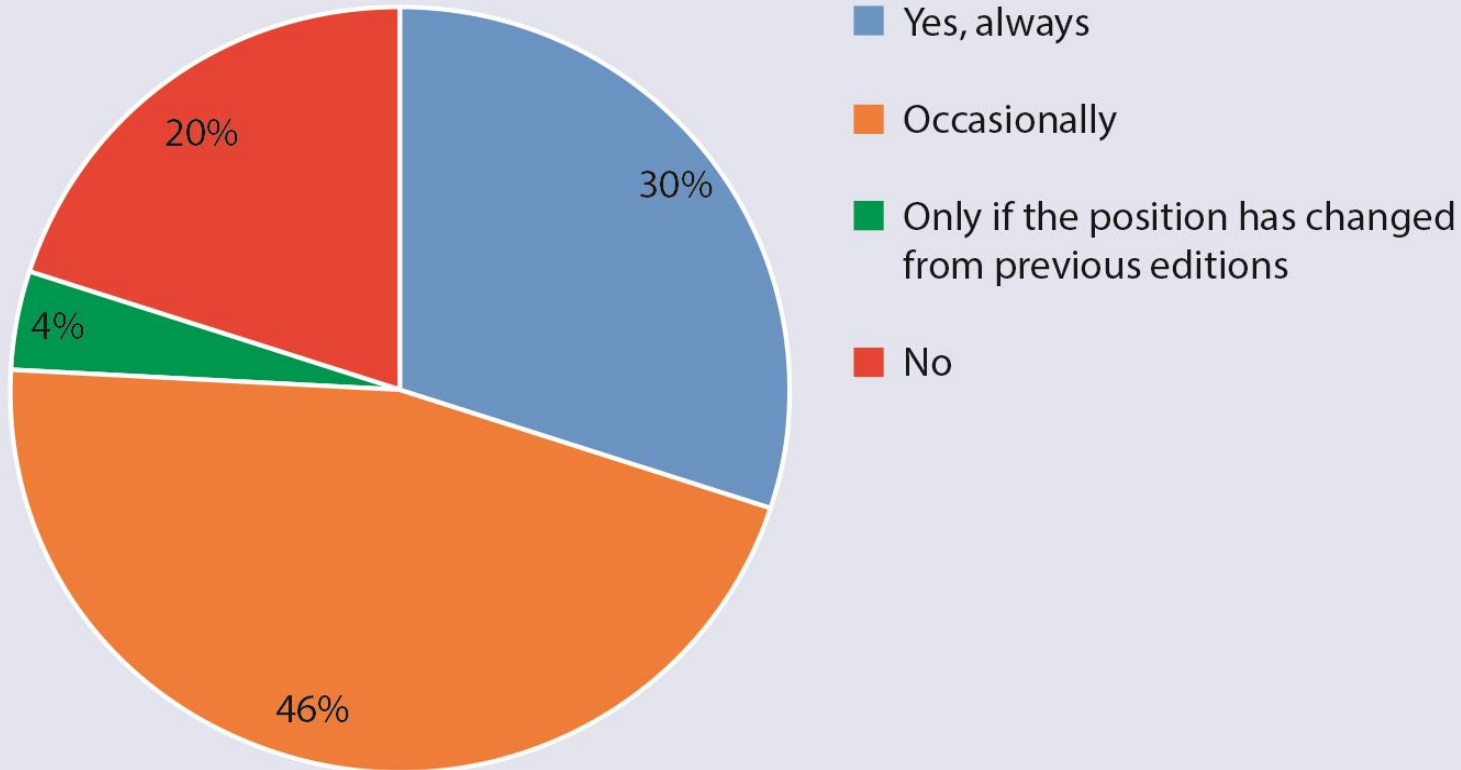


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# Actions taken because of rankings?

Strategic, organisational, managerial or academic actions taken	
There was no influence.	31%
Policies have been revised.	27%
Formal procedures remained the same, but a new focus was given to specific features.	26%
Some research areas have been prioritised.	23%
Recruitment and promotional criteria have been changed.	21%
Formal procedures have been revised.	17%
Resource allocation switched/changed.	14%
I believe it happens, but cannot really tell how.	14%
Some departments/entities/programmes have been established.	11%
Student entry criteria have been revised.	9%
Some departments/entities/programmes have been closed or merged.	8%
There was a merger with an external entity (other HEI, research institute...).	5%

# Rankings for marketing or publicity



N = 171



# Trends 2015

- Ranking schemes are highly important to only 33% of the 451 Trends respondents
- But this is +10% as compared to Trends 2010 responses
- And this trend is expected to continue:
  - ✓ their importance is expected to increase by 13%
  - ✓ the number of respondents for whom these schemes have no importance is expected to shrink
- Competition and collaboration very stable for past 15 years but expected to increase by about 18%



# Excellence schemes

- Research indicators are prominent in these initiatives:
  - ✓ very few include criteria related to teaching
  - ✓ only a small number of teaching-excellence initiatives
- If the lack of agreement on how to measure teaching quality persists, this will preserve the pre-eminence of research as the determinant of quality in higher education (Wespel, Orr and Jaeger 2013)
- DEFINE Project on Excellence schemes:
  - ✓ They contribute to sharpening the institutional profiles
  - ✓ They can distort the internal balance between research and education and among the different academic disciplines
  - ✓ In reflecting the priorities of the funder, they also distort institutional strategies

# Conclusions from RISP

- Institutions need to improve their capacity to generate comprehensive, high-quality data and information:
  - ✓ to underpin strategic planning and decision-making
  - ✓ to provide meaningful, comparative information about institutional performance to the public
- Rankings can be an important ingredient in strategic planning... nevertheless, it is vital that each university stays “true” to its mission and should not be “diverted or mesmerised” by rankings
- The report ends with guidelines on how institutions could use the rankings for strategic purposes

# Overall conclusions

- At the level of an institution, the concept of quality is more useful than rankings.
- At the system level concentration on the elite part of the system is a short-term strategy, particularly in post-industrial economies.

# References

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