



IREG Observatory  
on Academic Rankings and Excellence

From: President  
To: Members of IREG Observatory

## Report on Activities of IREG Observatory: May 2015 - May 2016

### Introduction

1. The period covered by this report - May 2015 – May 2016, corresponds to one year since the General Assembly of IREG Observatory which took place on June 12, 2015, following IREG Forum: *Subject and Discipline Related Rankings – For a More Inclusive Approach to University Performance* (11-12 June 2015, University of Aalborg, Denmark).
2. The period was marked foremost by **continuation** of activities that became a trademark of IREG Observatory i.e. annual conferences, specialized website, etc. as well as **undertaking** of new activities relevant to university ranking and academic excellence.

### Activities

3. Preparations for organization of ***IREG-8 Conference: University Rankings and International Academic Relations - a Bridging Tool or a Hindrance?***, 4-6 May 2016, Lisbon, Portugal required particular attention. The conference has been organized in partnership in partnership with *CRUP* (Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities) and *CRASP* (Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools of Poland). This partnership should be seen as a tacit support of the mission and work done by IREG Observatory. IREG-8 Conference has been hosted by the *Universidade NOVA de Lisboa*. The general support of the university was essential for a successful organization of the meeting. In this context, special recognition is due to Professor António Rendas, Rector of *Universidade NOVA de Lisboa*, whose contribution to the programme and organization of the meeting has been crucial.
4. Since its inception IREG Observatory is committed to enhancement of public awareness and understanding of what “university rankings” represent as well as promotion of good practices with regard to their use. Adoption of the *Berlin Principles on Ranking of Higher Education Institutions* (2006) has been pioneering moments, which lead to elaboration of the “***Guidelines for Stakeholders of Academic Rankings***”. The document, preceded by ample

discussions, was adopted in May 2015 at the meeting hosted by the Aalborg University and as such is also referred to as the “*Aalborg Guidelines*”.

5. The format of the guidelines has been deliberately designed to reach six distinct categories of stakeholders: students and parents; higher education institutions; policy makers, governments and funding agencies; employers; quality assurance and accreditation organizations. For a similar argument, in addition to English text, the following linguistic versions has been produced by members of our organization [all of them are available on [www.ireg-observatory.org](http://www.ireg-observatory.org)]:

- Arabic version [King Saud University],
- Chinese version [Shanghai Jiao Tong University],
- French version [Observatoire des Sciences et Techniques/HCERES],
- Russian version [People’s Friendship University of Russia/RUDN University and Expert RA/RAEX],
- Spanish version [University of Navarra].

In order to assure wide information about the guidelines several members of IREG Observatory have already presented the document on their official web pages, usually with a hyperlink to IREG Observatory website.

6. Based on outcomes of 2<sup>nd</sup> *Maribor Academicus Event* entitled *Academic Excellence: Between Holy Grail and Measurable Objectives*, (19-20 January 2015, Maribor, Slovenia), team chaired by Nian Cai Liu, Professor and Director of Centre for World-Class Universities and Dean of Graduate School of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Vice-President of IREG Observatory, come out with the document - ***IREG List of International Academic Awards***. The project has allowed our organization to get a good insight into disciplinary, institutional and geographical distribution of “international academic awards” as one of expressions of academic excellence. The updated list of such awards will be produced at least each second year.

7. In 2012, IREG Observatory has launched a project “***IREG Audit***”. Until now, national rankings produced by two ranking organizations - *Perspektywy* Education Foundation, Poland, and CHE-Centre for Higher Education, Germany as well as one international ranking organization – QS/Quacquarelli Symonds, have successfully passed the procedure and received the rights to use [for a usual period of 3 years] quality label “*IREG Approved*”. In the period covered by this report ranking – *Russian University Ranking*, which is produced by Expert RA/RAEX, received the same rights for the period ending on December 31, 2019.

Meanwhile, based on accumulated experience IREG Observatory attempts to review and simplify IREG Ranking Audit procedure. In order to carry on this task, the Executive Committee has decided to establish a Working Group that is chaired by Gero Federkeil, Vice-president of IREG Observatory. The outcome of the discussions of this group should result in an updated text of the *IREG Audit Ranking Manual*.

8. The Executive Committee of IREG Observatory meeting in Brussels on 20 February 2016 voted and re-elected Klaus Hübner, Professor Emeritus, Free University of Berlin, Germany, as Coordinator of IREG Ranking Audit for the period 20 February 2016 – 20 February 2018.

9. The 2015 IREG Forum provided a closer look at “subject and discipline rankings” which nowadays are constructed by majority of providers of national and global academic rankings. One of the main outcomes of the discussion at the meeting was recognition of substantial differences when assessing the outcome and quality of research and study programs in such academic disciplines as *engineering and technology* as well as *medicine and health related sciences*. Lack of recognition of disciplinary specificities results in distortions when assessing comprehensive productivity and quality and as such can also be harmful for sustaining diversity of institutions and the development of these disciplines. Drawing on on-going discussions, IREG Observatory has decided to initiate the following two projects:

- ***New Approaches to Design and Collection of Data for Subject and Discipline Rankings: Engineering and Technology***  
Coordinator: Waldemar Siwinski, Vice-president IREG Observatory, Chairman of Perspektywy Education Foundation, Poland.
  
- ***New Approaches to Design and Collection of Data for Subject and Discipline Rankings: Life and Biomedical Sciences***  
Coordinator: Marko Marhl, Professor, University of Maribor, Slovenia, Member of the IREG Executive Committee, and Olesya Lynovytska, Scientific Research Institute of Applied Information Technologies, Ukraine, Member of the IREG Executive Committee.

It is foreseen that discussions based on commissioned papers would lead to a formulation of new approaches to design and collection of data as well as recommendations for discipline-sensitive indicators for subject rankings. It should be pointed out that participation in these two projects is open to all members of IREG Observatory.

10. In order to enhance an international visibility and promote its activities IREG Observatory recently initiated the “***IREG Global Exposure***” project. It is within this project IREG Observatory participated in the following events:

- NAFSA 2015 Annual Conference with a theme “*New Horizons in International Education*” (23-29 May 2015, Boston, USA).

During this event a session “*How National Rankings Can Serve as a Tool for Finding Partners Abroad*” was prepared by internationally recognized experts active, at present or in the past, at IREG Observatory: Waldemar Siwiński, Vice President of IREG Observatory (chair of the session); Laura Rumbley, Boston College, USA (former IREG website editor); and Alex Usher, President of HE Strategy Associates, Canada (member of the group that preceded founding of IREG Observatory). The session was focused on utility of academic rankings in the process of internationalization of higher education.

- APAIE 2016 Annual Conference with a theme "*Asia Pacific – A Global Education and Research Powerhouse: New models of cooperation in research engagement and education mobility for the 2020's*" (29 February - 3 March 2016, Melbourne, Australia).

During this event representatives of the IREG Observatory organized the session "*University rankings and international mobility*". The principal speakers were Waldemar Siwinski and Kazimierz Bilanow, Managing Director of IREG Observatory.

Both events – the NAFSA 2015 and the APAIE 2016 had provided ample opportunities to promote activities of our organization in particular IREG-8 Conference in Lisbon and 2017 IREG Forum which carrying theme is "*Excellence as University's Driving Force*" (12–13 March, 2017). The Qatar University will host the meeting.

11. Positive comments received after publication of "*IREG Inventory of National University Rankings*", which has been implemented by the Perspektywy Education Foundation, lead to a decision to launch a similar project – *IREG Inventory on International Rankings (Global and Regional)*. The Steering Committee, composed of members of our organization, has developed a questionnaire that will serve as a tool for collecting relevant information. The road map of this project foresee that its outcomes will be presented at 2017 IREG Forum in Qatar.

12. Taking into consideration importance of sharing information about developments relevant to academic ranking and excellence as well as providing additional information to members of IREG Observatory an effort is made to upgrade a website of our organization. The progress made in the content of the website is remarkable and foremost due to collaboration with Richard Holmes, who is an analyst of academic ranking and editor of the blog "*University Ranking Watch*".

13. It should also be reported that during the period covered by this report some member institutions of our organization has organized events which are in line with a statutory mission of IREG Observatory and in which the organization was involved as co-organizer and/or participant. Among them the most relevant being:

- 4<sup>th</sup> "*Perspektywy Ranking Seminar*" organized by the Perspektywy Education Foundation (22 July 2015, Warsaw, Poland);
- 6<sup>th</sup> "*International Conference on World-Class Universities - WCU-6*", organized by the Center for World-Class Universities of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (1-4 November 2015, Shanghai, China);
- International Seminar "*Changes in Ranking Methodologies*" organized by Perspektywy Education Foundation (11-12 February 2016, Yekaterinburg, Russia);
- International Webinar on "*Key performance indicators for Higher Education*" organized by The KPI [Key Performance Indicators] Institute,

Melbourne, Australia. Convener and key speaker: Paul Serban Agachi, Professor, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania, Member of the IREG Executive Committee (24 February 2016);

- International Conference organized by the Russian New University n “Universities’ Institutional Cooperation Issues and Development of International Scientific-Technical and Educational Partnership for Securing Russia’s Innovative Development”, 7-8 April 2016, Moscow, Russia
- 2nd International Workshop on UI Greenmetric organized by the University of Indonesia (UI), (21 April 2016, Jakarta, Indonesia).

### **Final Observation**

14. The annual report of activities carried out by IREG Observatory give evidence to continuous development of the organization. Presented activities show that IREG Observatory is able to serve as a forum of discussion and a facilitator of the exchange of knowledge on academic ranking and excellence. This has also found its confirmation in a continuous increase of the number of members of our organization, media attention and participation of IREG Observatory in major academic events [see also *Report on activities undertaken by President of IREG Observatory related to mission and program of IREG Observatory: January – December 2016*].

Brussels/Warsaw, May 2016.